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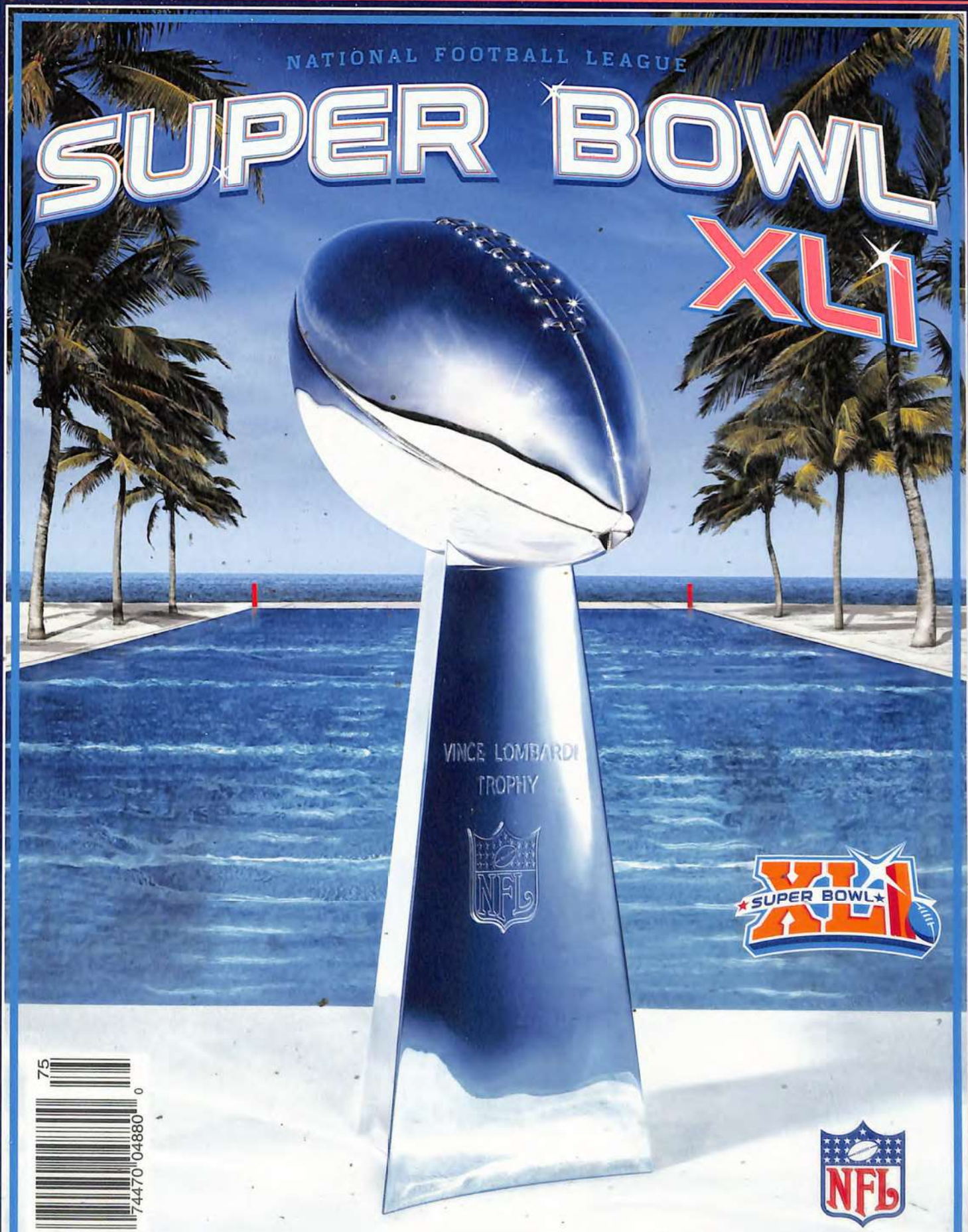

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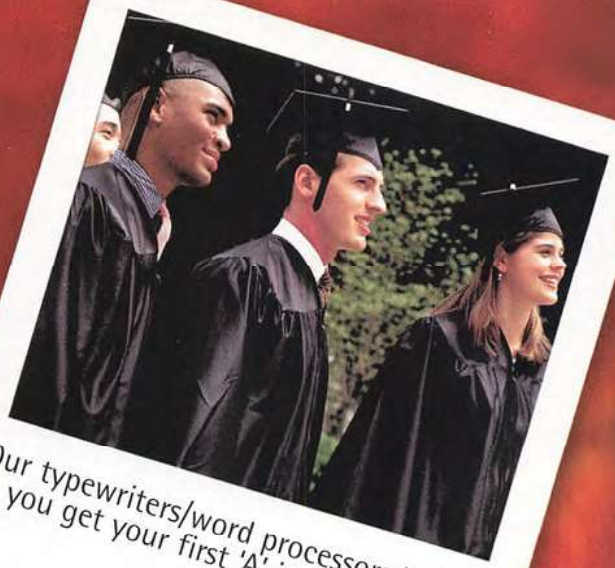

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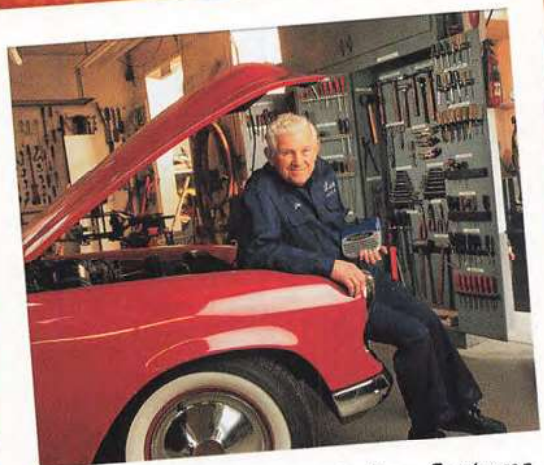

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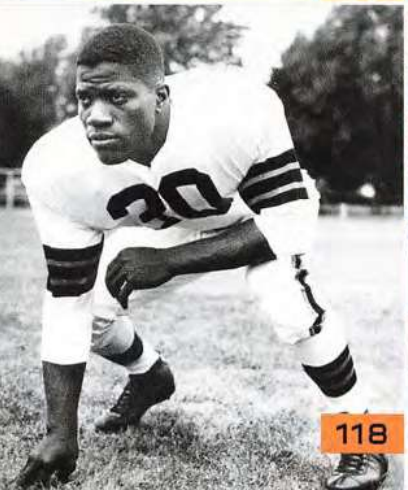

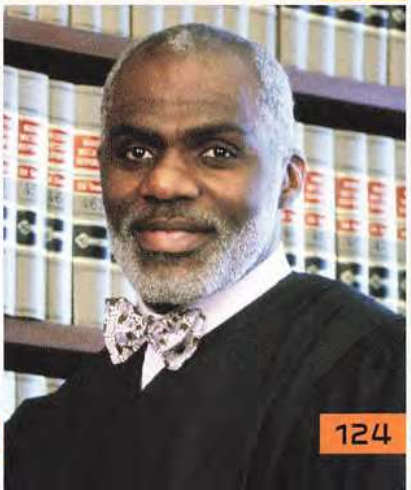

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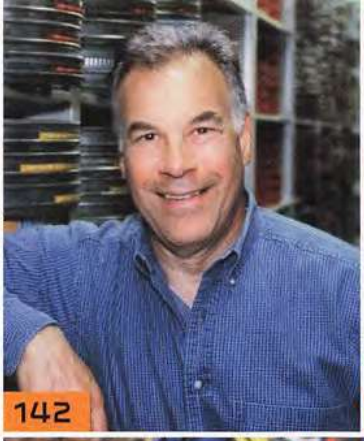
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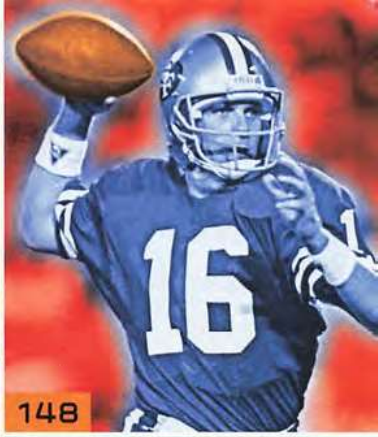

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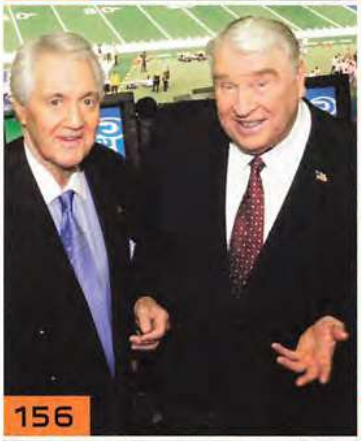
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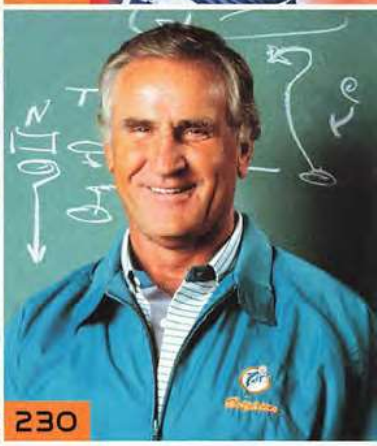
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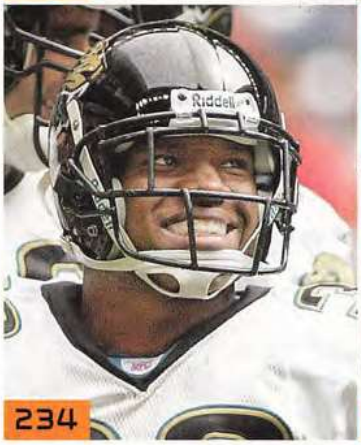

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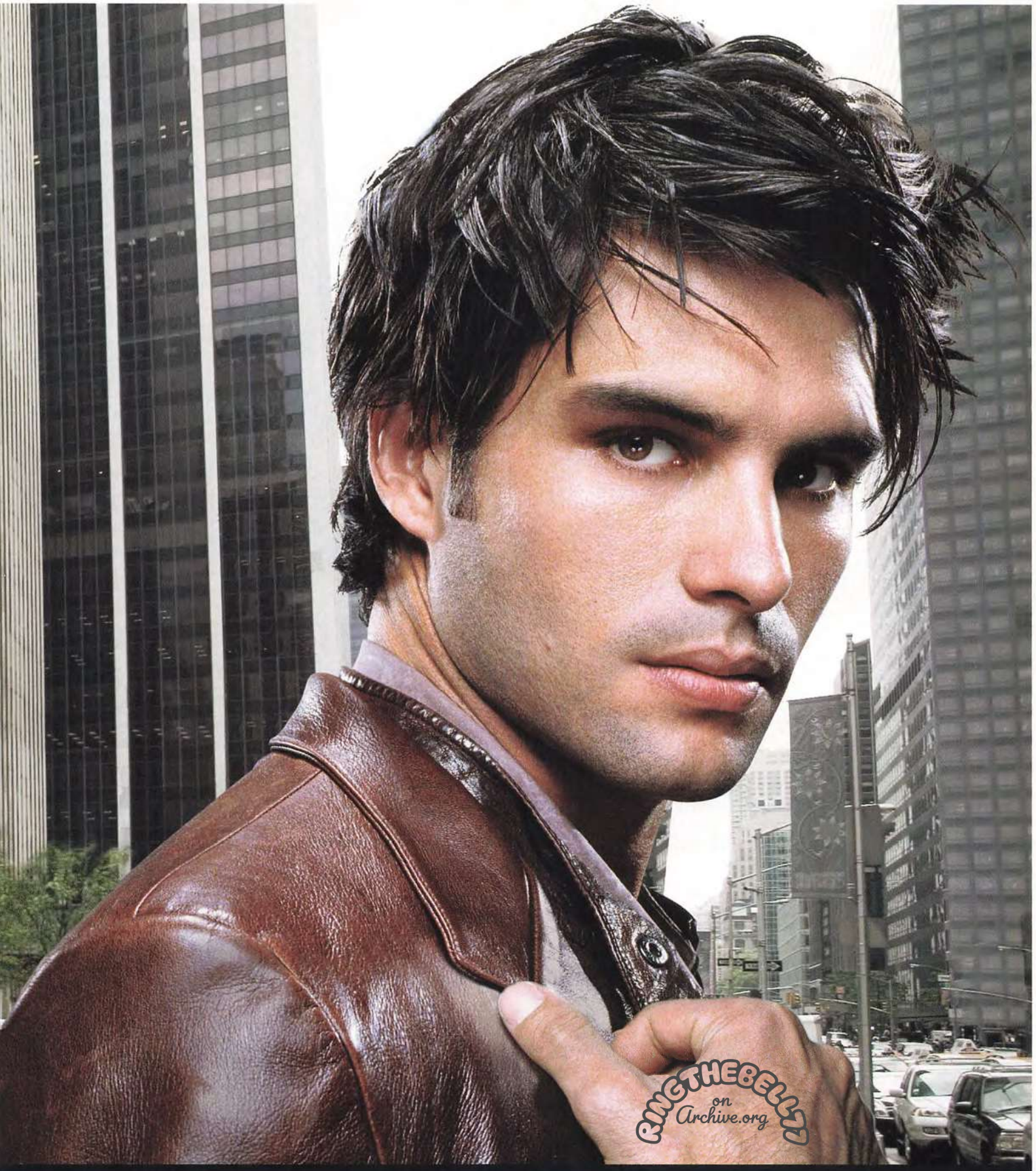

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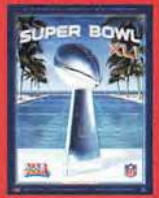

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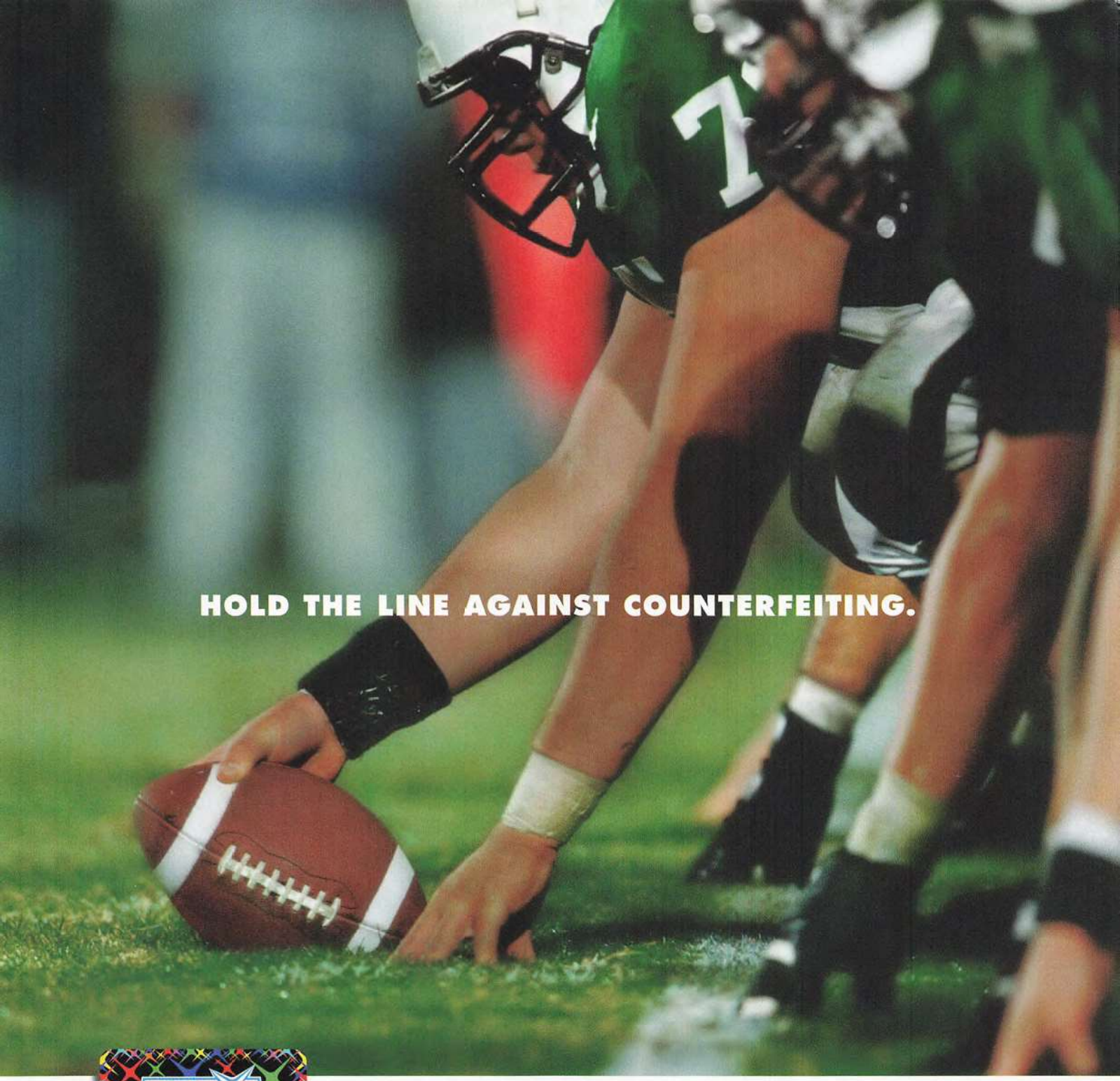

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FROM THE COMMISSIONER

On behalf of everyone in the National Football League, welcome to Super Bowl XLI.

With our dual mission to embrace both tradition and innovation, it is fitting that the NFL crowns its champion this year in South Florida. This community has seen its share of classic Super Bowl moments, having hosted the game eight times in previous years.

South Florida is ever evolving, having enjoyed significant growth and change since we began playing Super Bowls here in 1968. So an entirely new chapter of Super Bowl history will be written here in 2007 and again in 2010 when we return for Super Bowl XLIV.

The extraordinary diversity and multiculturalism of our host community are fitting attributes for our Super Bowl week celebration. The Super Bowl is not only an unofficial American holiday that unites our entire nation, but it also has grown into a major international event.

There is nothing quite like the Super Bowl. And that is because there is nothing quite like the NFL. Once again during the 2006 season, NFL teams—players, coaches, and staff—demonstrated that we have the world's greatest game and greatest athletes.

Fantastic finishes and dramatic comebacks were the norm this season. Established veterans such as Peyton Manning and LaDainian Tomlinson and Brian Urlacher were joined by the emergence of rising young stars—Philip Rivers, Vince Young, A.J. Hawk, Laurence Maroney and Tony Romo, to name just a few.

We salute our teams for the quality of the competition they continue to present year in and year out. Just as vigorously, we salute our fans. Unprecedented attendance at NFL games this season reminds us of the unique passion of NFL fans. From the NFL family to yours, we thank you for your support this year and every year.

Enjoy Super Bowl XLI!

A nombre de toda la National Football League, bienvenidos al Super Bowl XLI.

Con nuestra misión doble de fomentar tanto la tradición así como la innovación, es apropiado que la NFL corone su campeón en el Sur de la Florida este año. Esta región ha presenciado momentos clásicos de Super Bowls, como sede de ocho clásicos a través de los años.

El Sur de la Florida continúa su evolución, incorporando un crecimiento y unos cambios importantes desde que comenzamos a escenificar Super Bowls aquí en 1968. Un nuevo capítulo en la historia del Super Bowl se escribirá en esta región en el 2007 y una vez más en el 2010, cuando retornemos para el Super Bowl XLIV.

La diversidad y la contribución de muchas vertientes culturales de nuestra ciudad sede son rasgos apropiados para nuestra celebración de la semana del Super Bowl. El Super Bowl no sólo es un feriado extraoficial estadounidense que une a todo nuestro país, es también un evento importante a nivel internacional.

No hay nada que se asemeje a un Super Bowl. Eso se debe a que no hay nada que se asemeje a la NFL. Una vez más, durante la temporada del 2006, los equipos de la NFL,—jugadores, entrenadores y administradores—demostraron que contamos con los mejores atletas en el mejor deporte en el mundo.

Cada semana producía finales de película y resurgimientos dramáticos. Veteranos establecidos como Peyton Manning, LaDainian Tomlinson y Brian Urlacher fueron acompañados por estrellas jóvenes emergentes—Philip Rivers, Vince Young, A.J. Hawk, Laurence Maroney y Tony Romo, entre muchos otros.

Felicitamos a nuestros equipos por la calidad de competición que presentan año tras año. Con el mismo empeño, felicitamos a nuestros aficionados. Los niveles de asistencia a los estadios sin precedente durante los partidos de NFL esta temporada son una demostración de la pasión inusual que siente el aficionado a la NFL. De la familia de la NFL a la suya, agradecemos su apoyo este año y todos los años.

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Roger Goodell

Roger Goodell

NFL Commissioner

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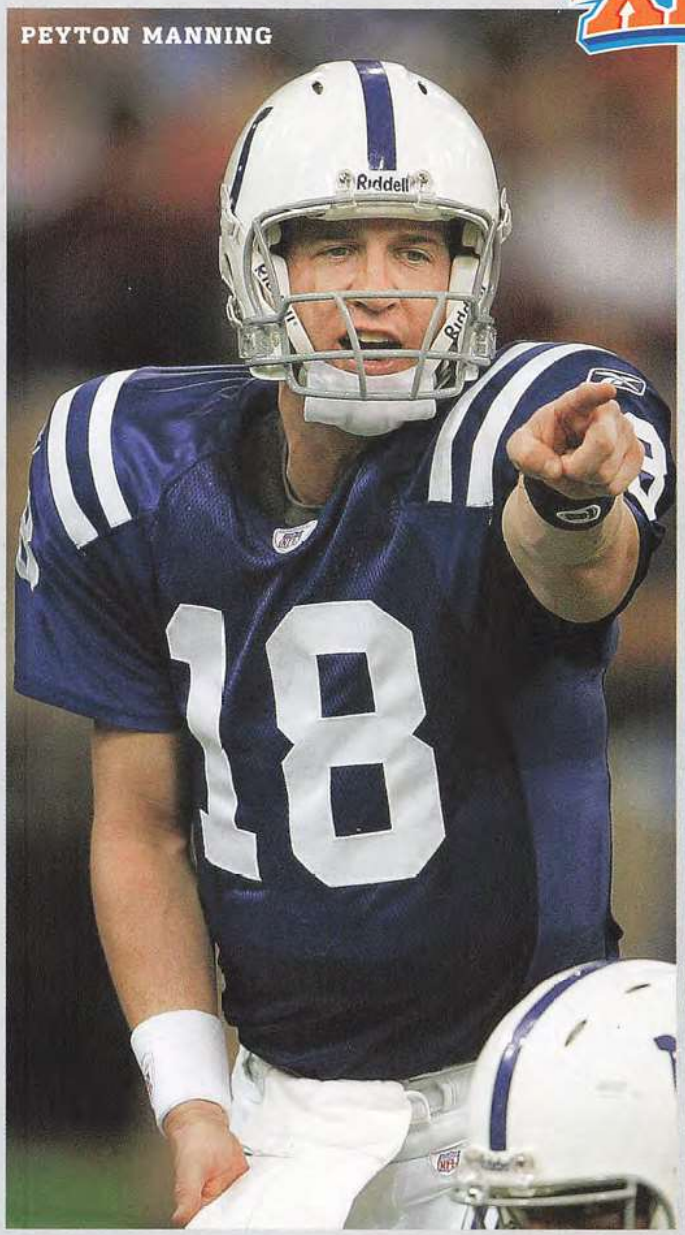

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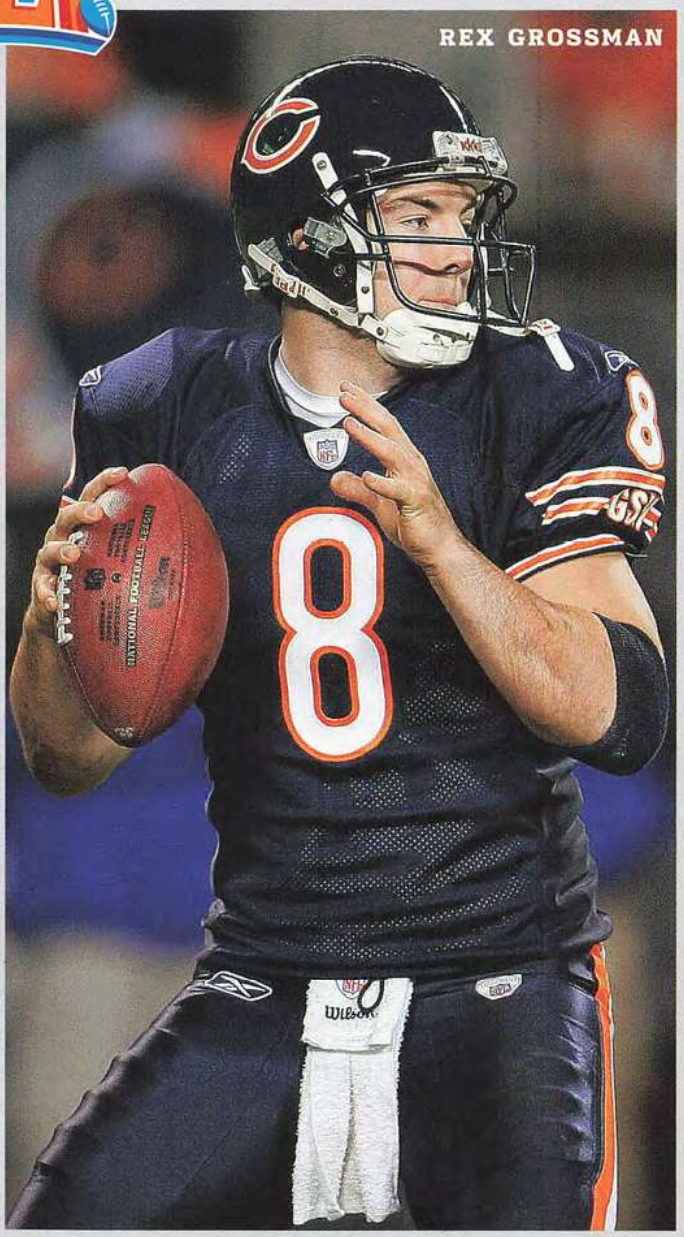

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PICTURING THE CHAMPIONS

THE COLTS AND BEARS HAVE ARRIVED AT SUPER BOWL XLI. ONE TEAM IS 60 MINUTES AWAY FROM FULFILLING ITS DREAM.

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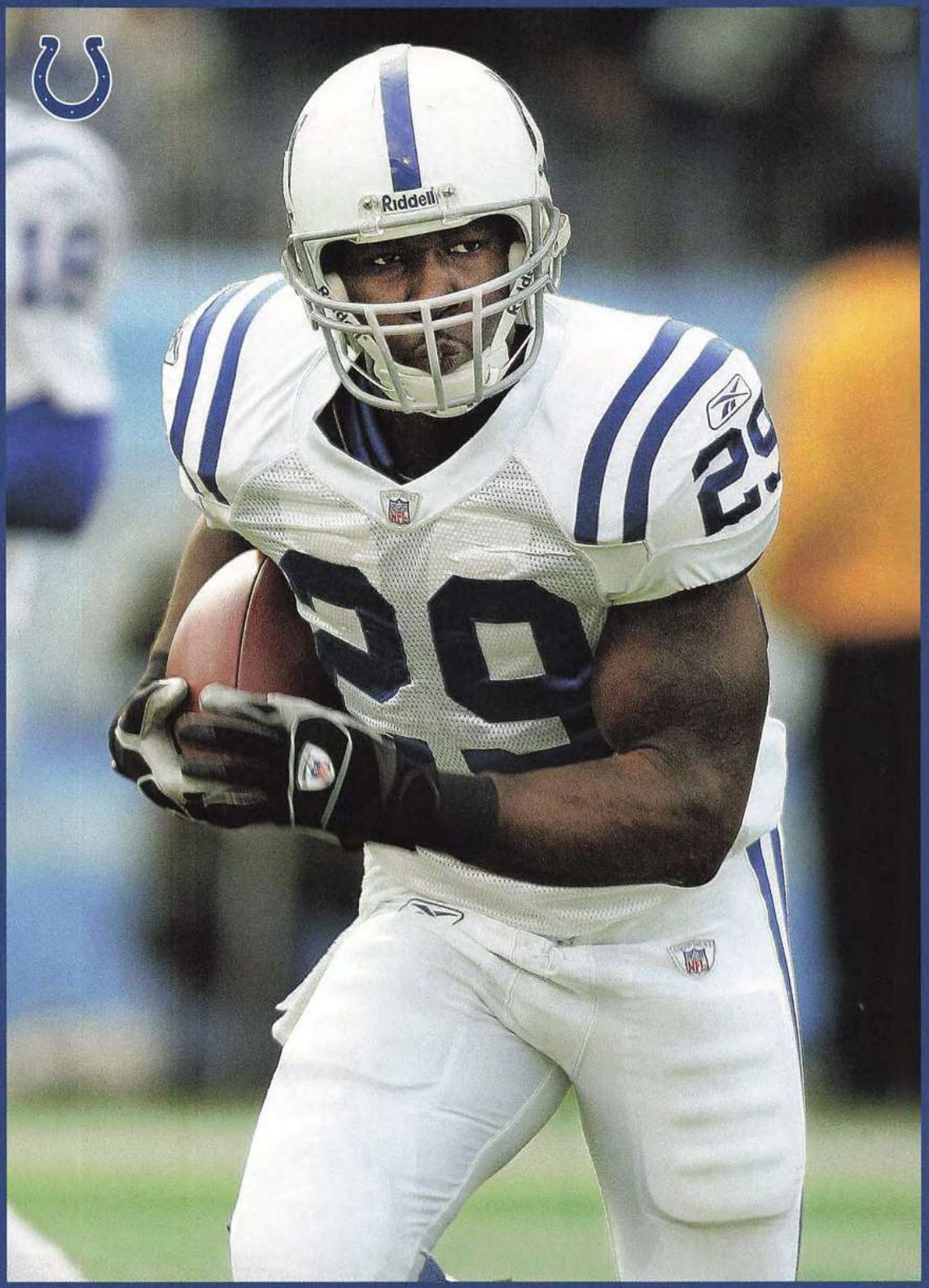

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JOSEPH ADDAI, INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

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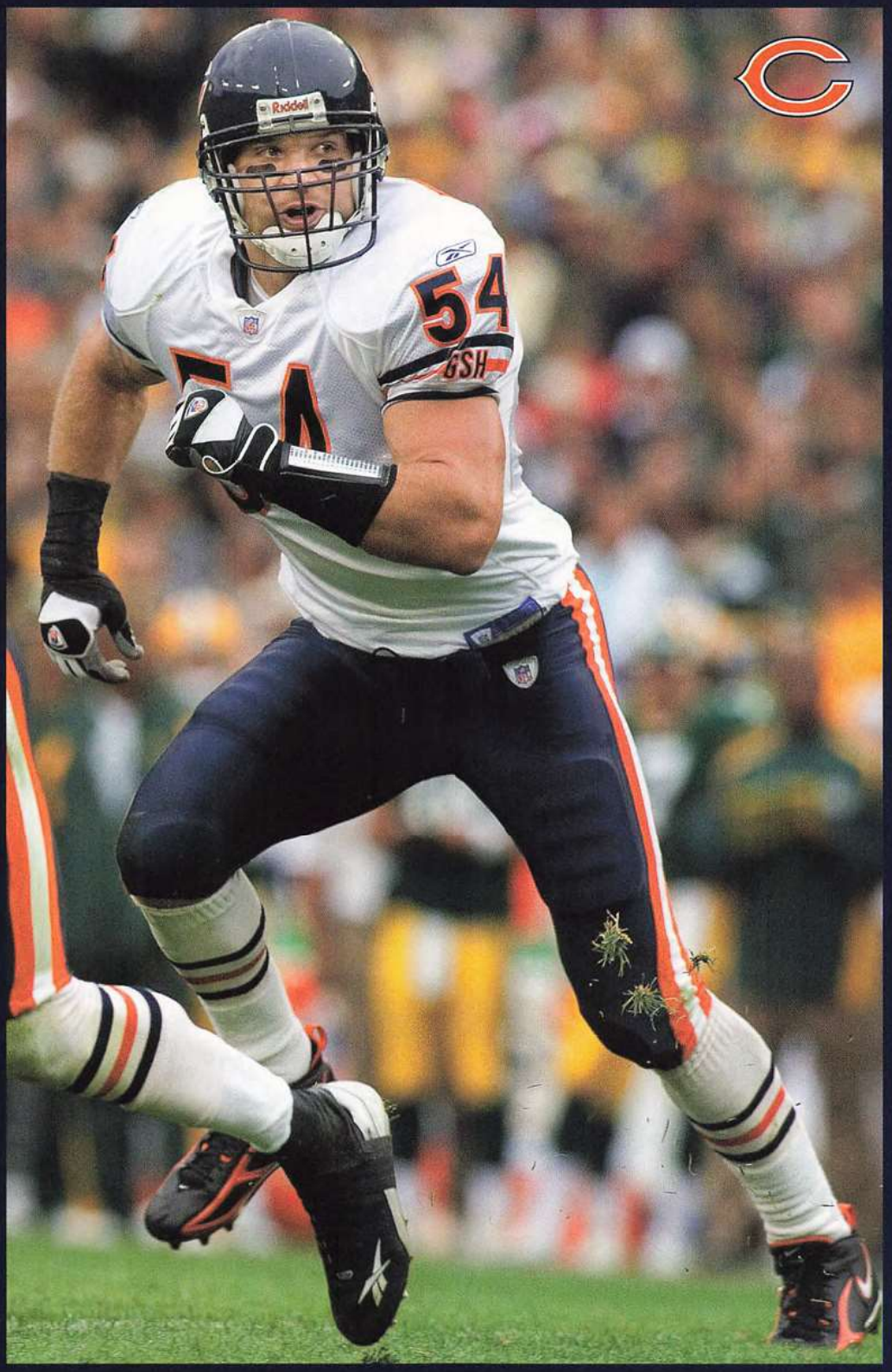

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BRIAN URLACHER, CHICAGO BEARS

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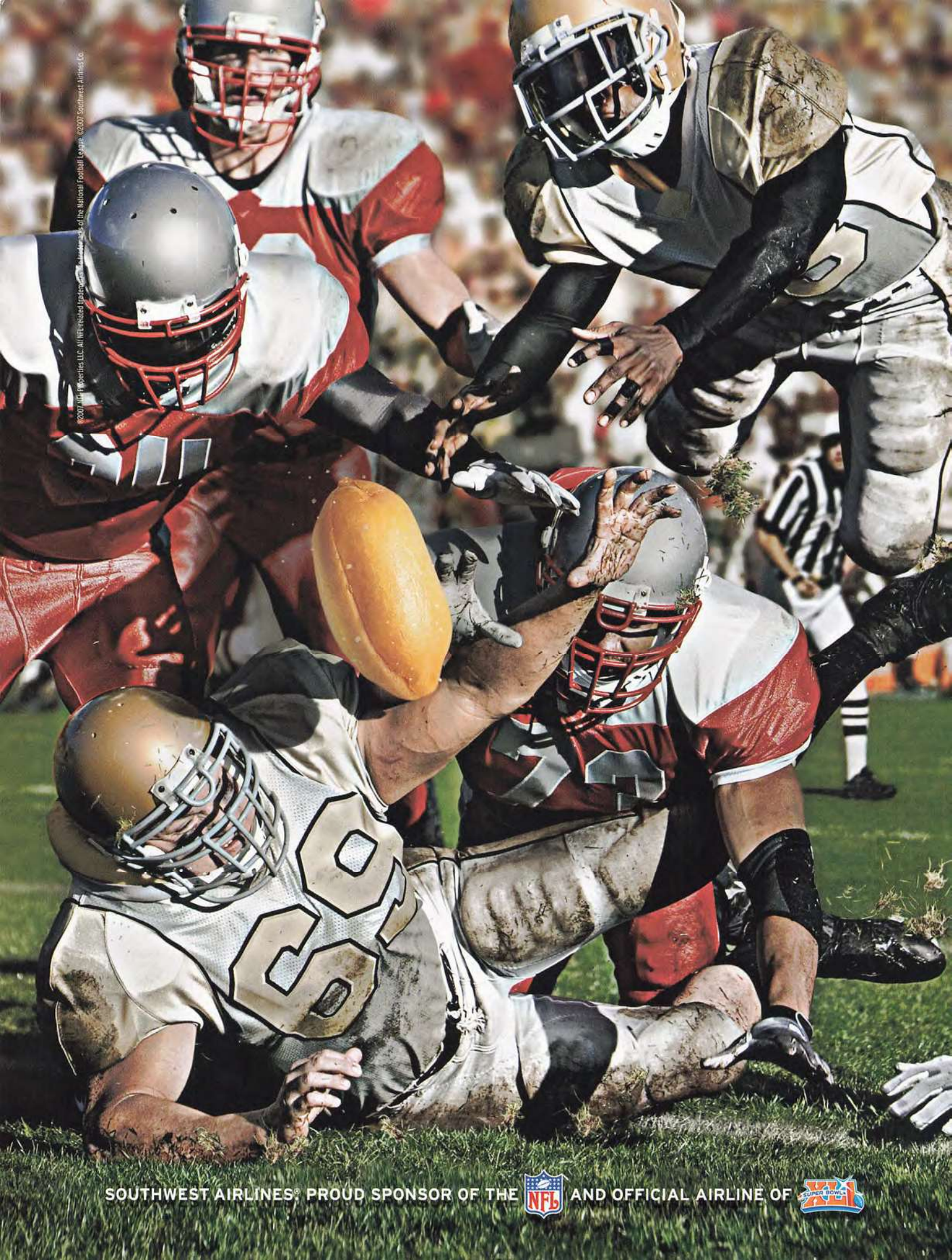
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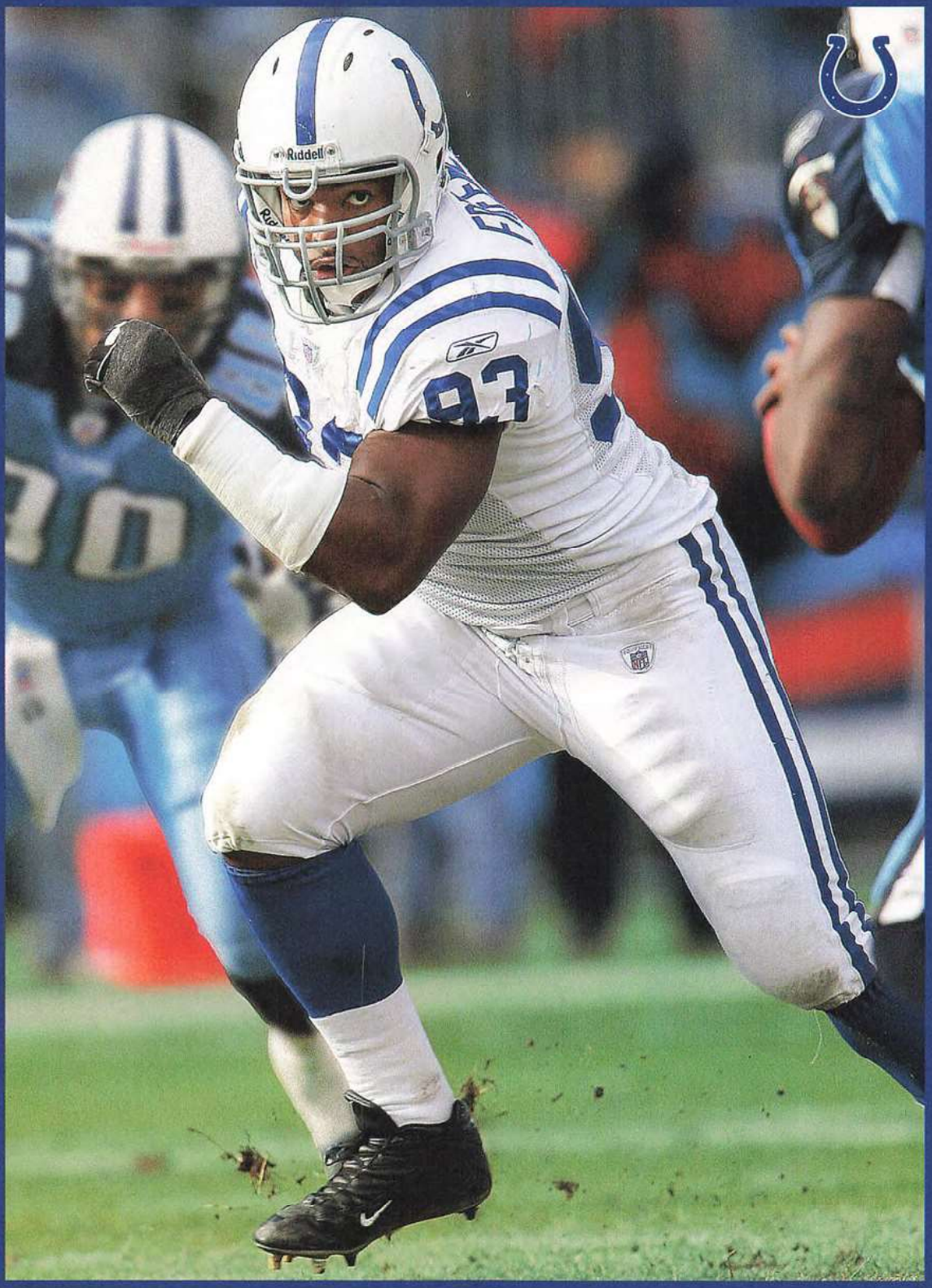

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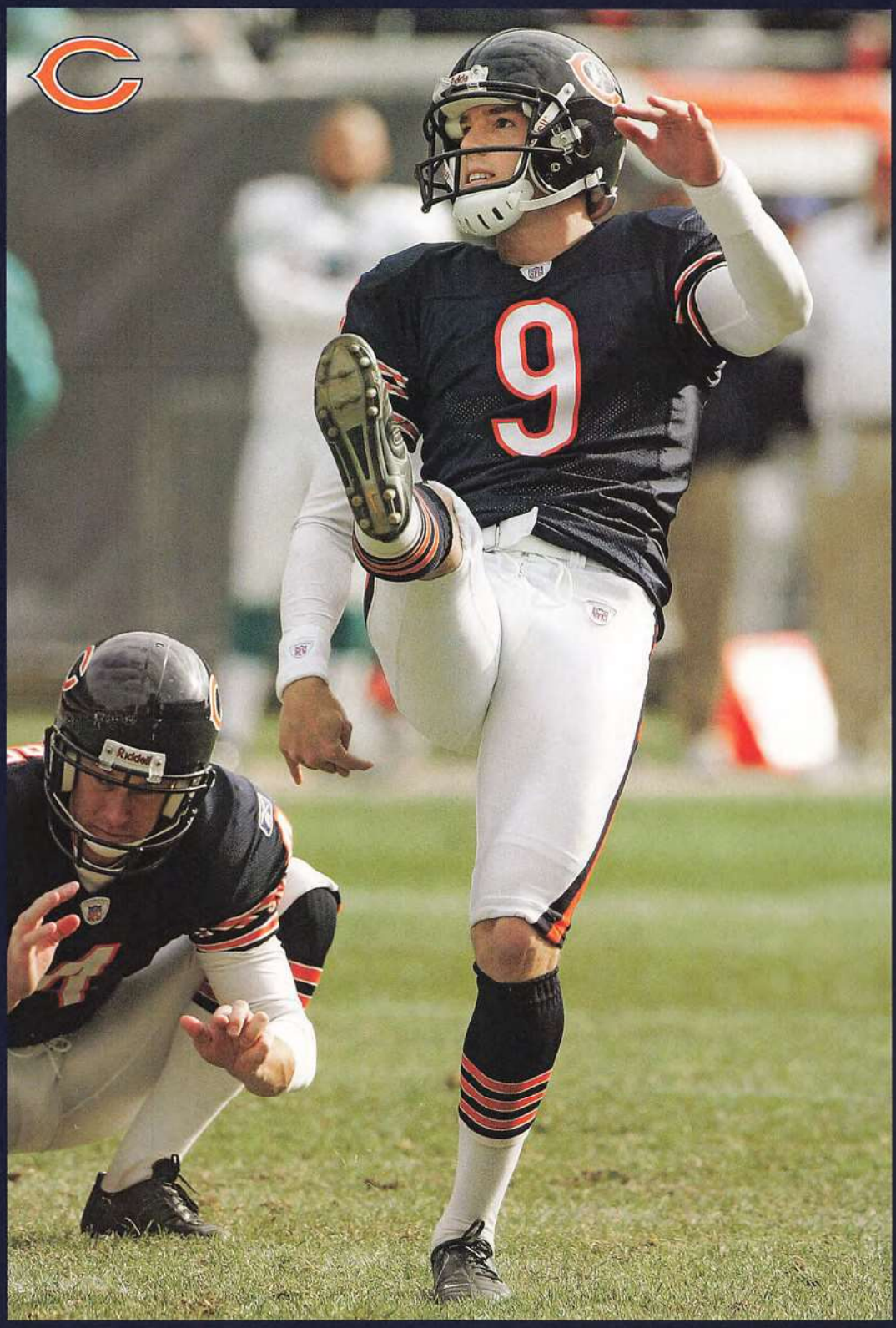

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ROBBIE GOULD, CHICAGO BEARS

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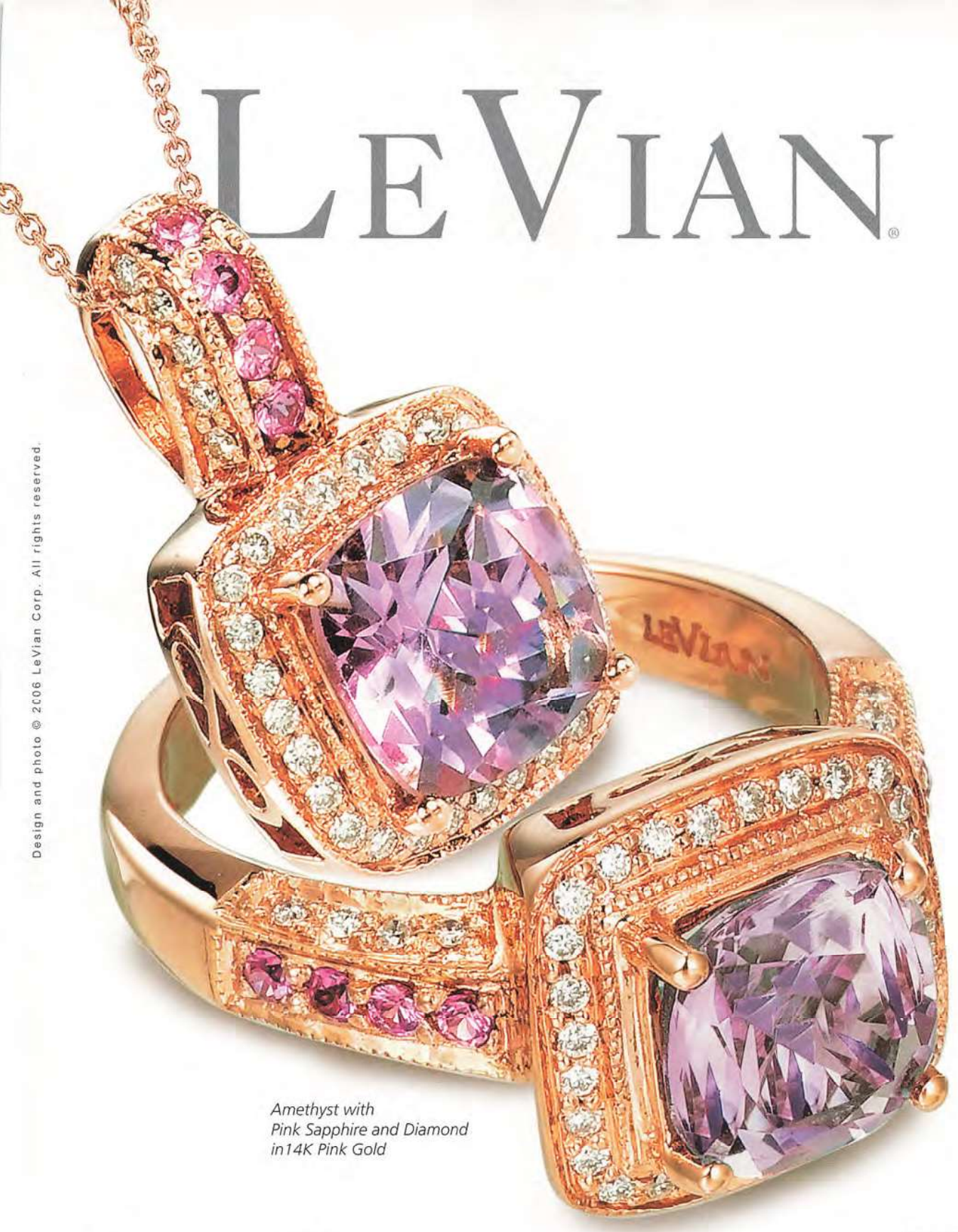

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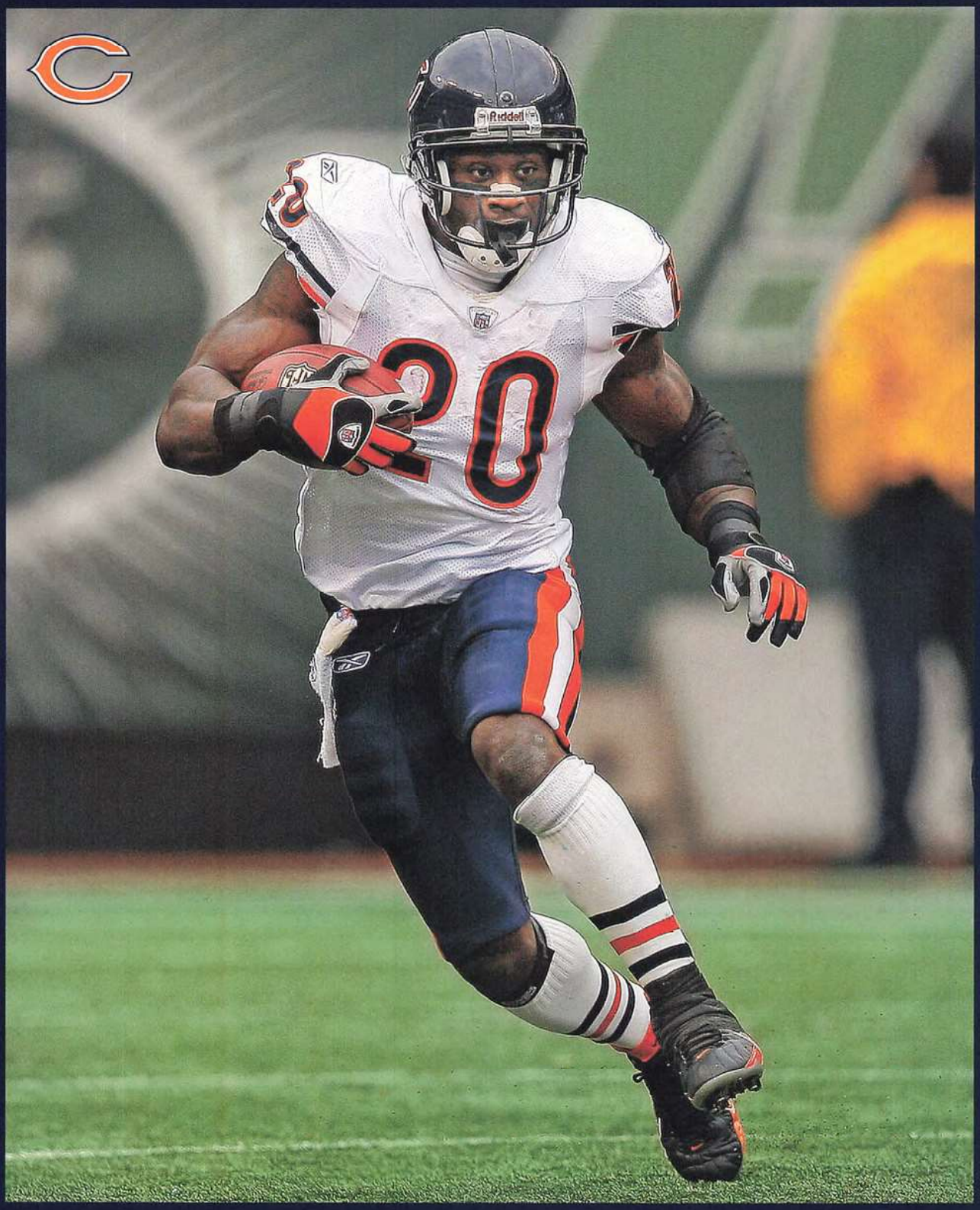

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THOMAS JONES, CHICAGO BEARS

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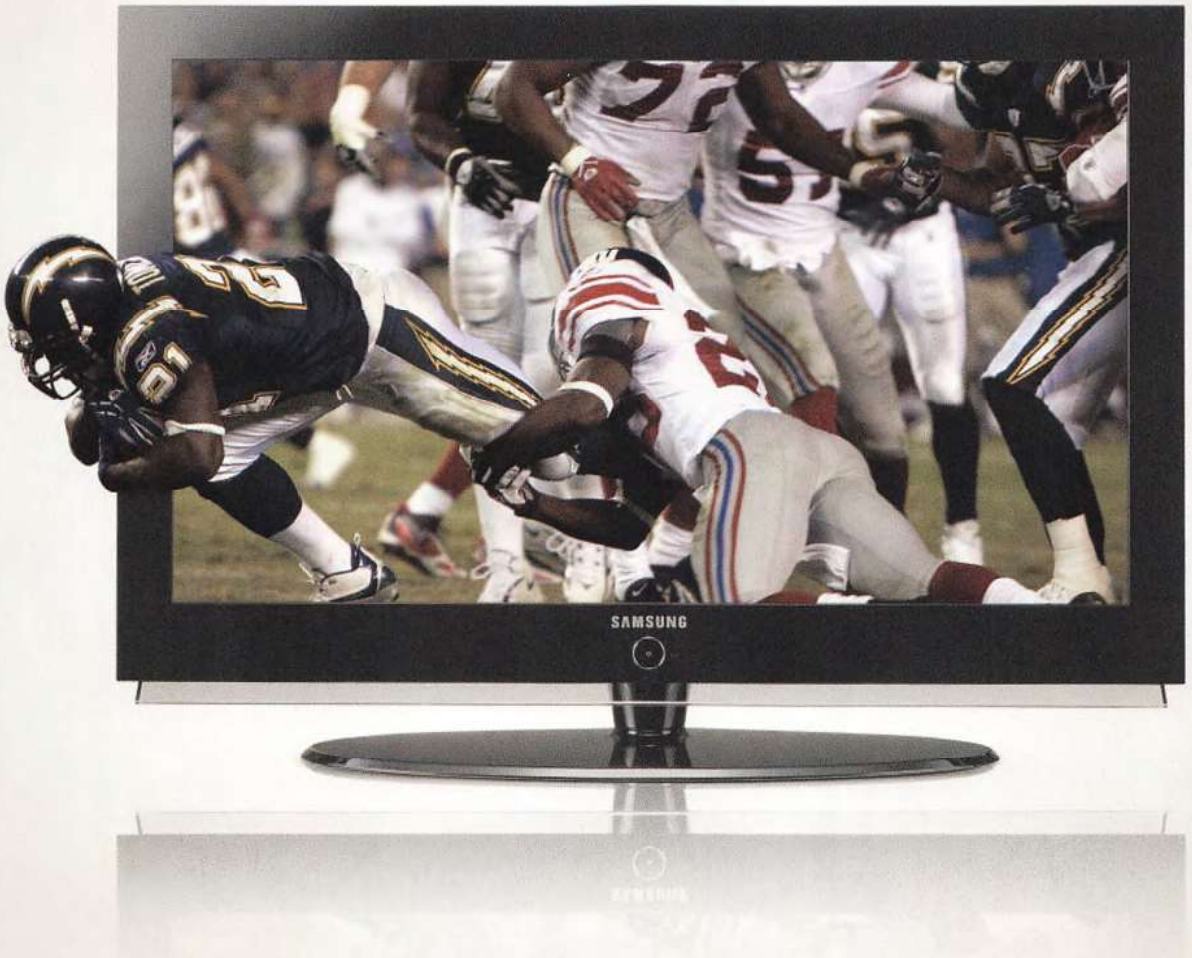

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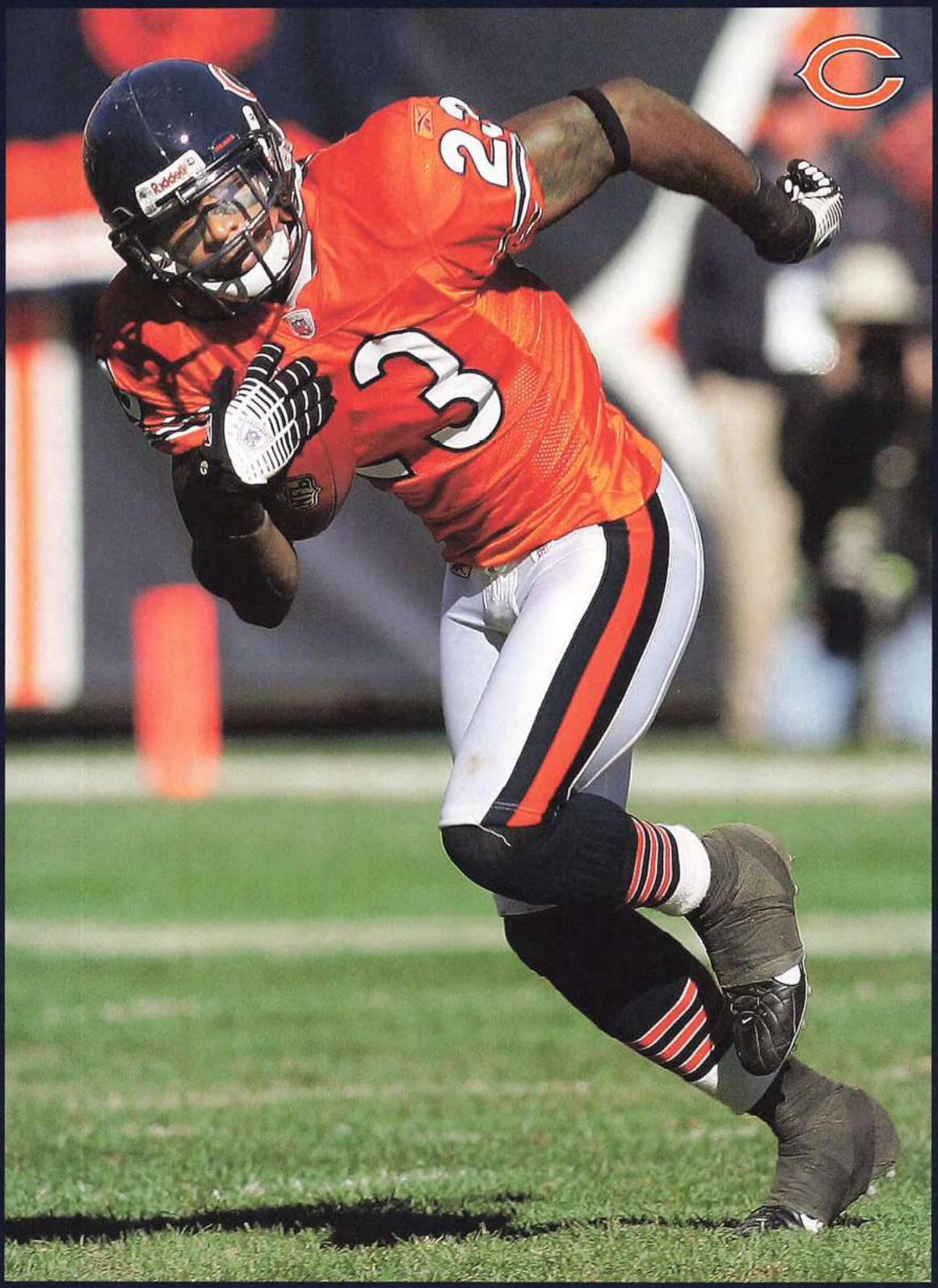

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DEVIN HESTER, CHICAGO BEARS

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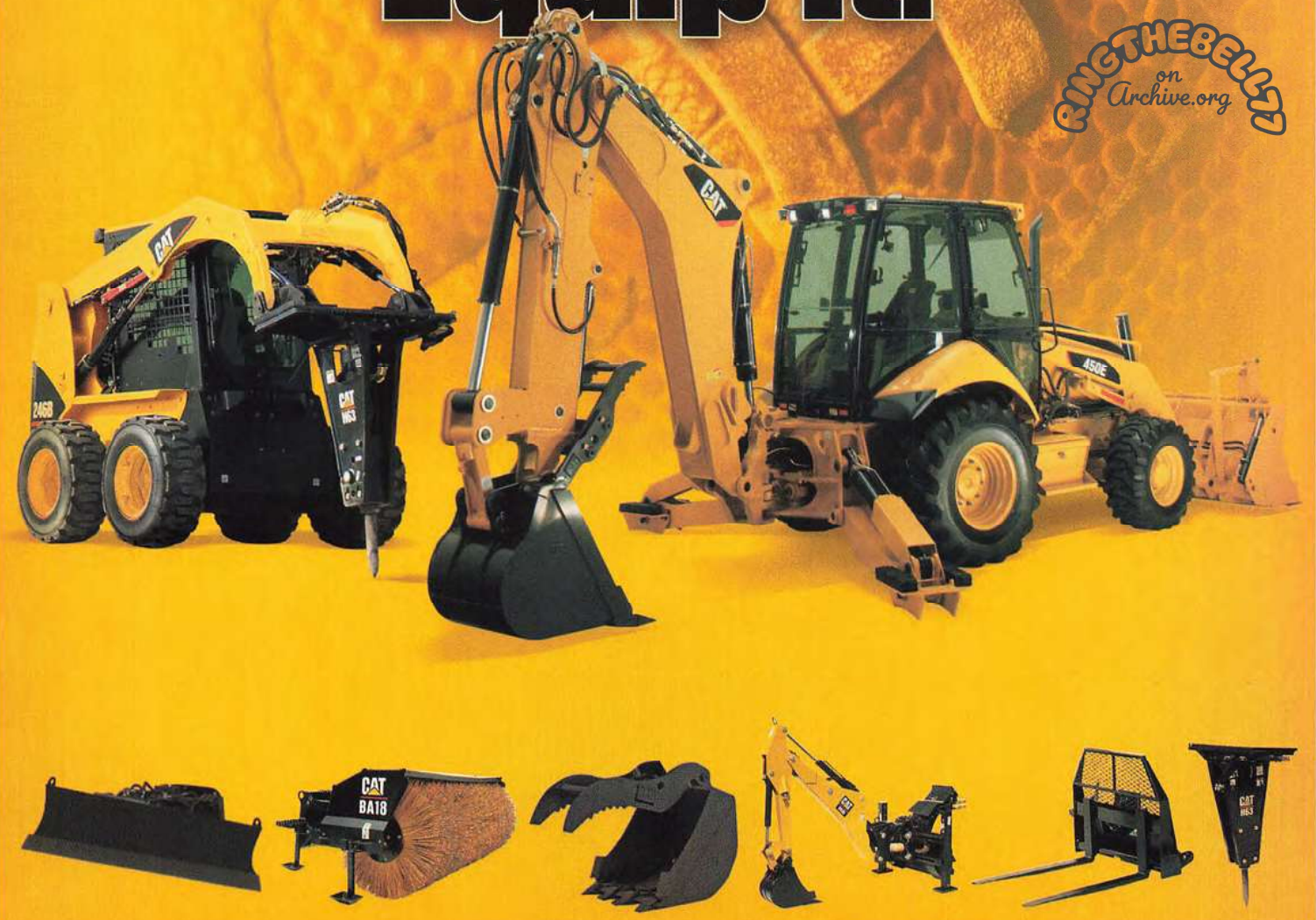

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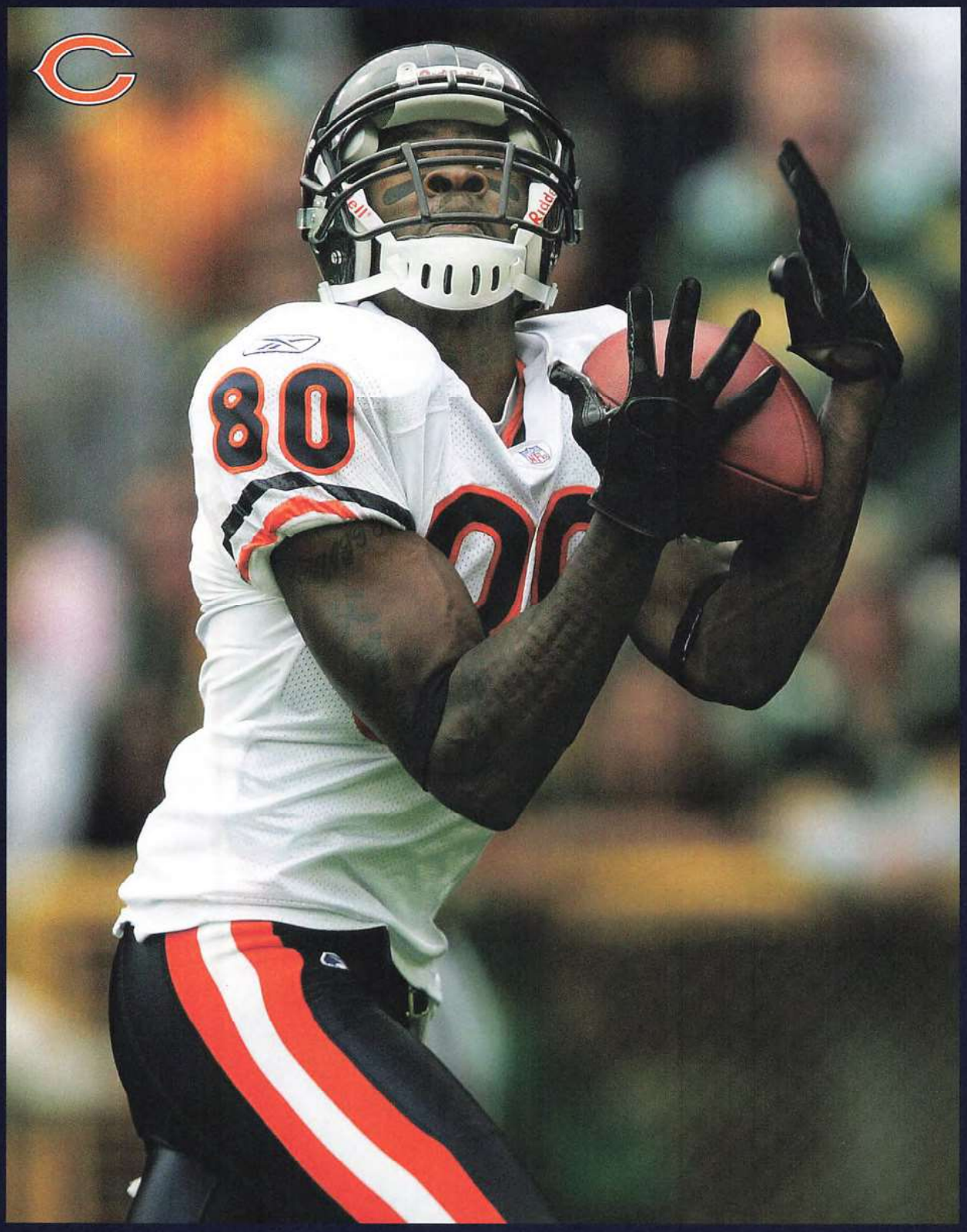
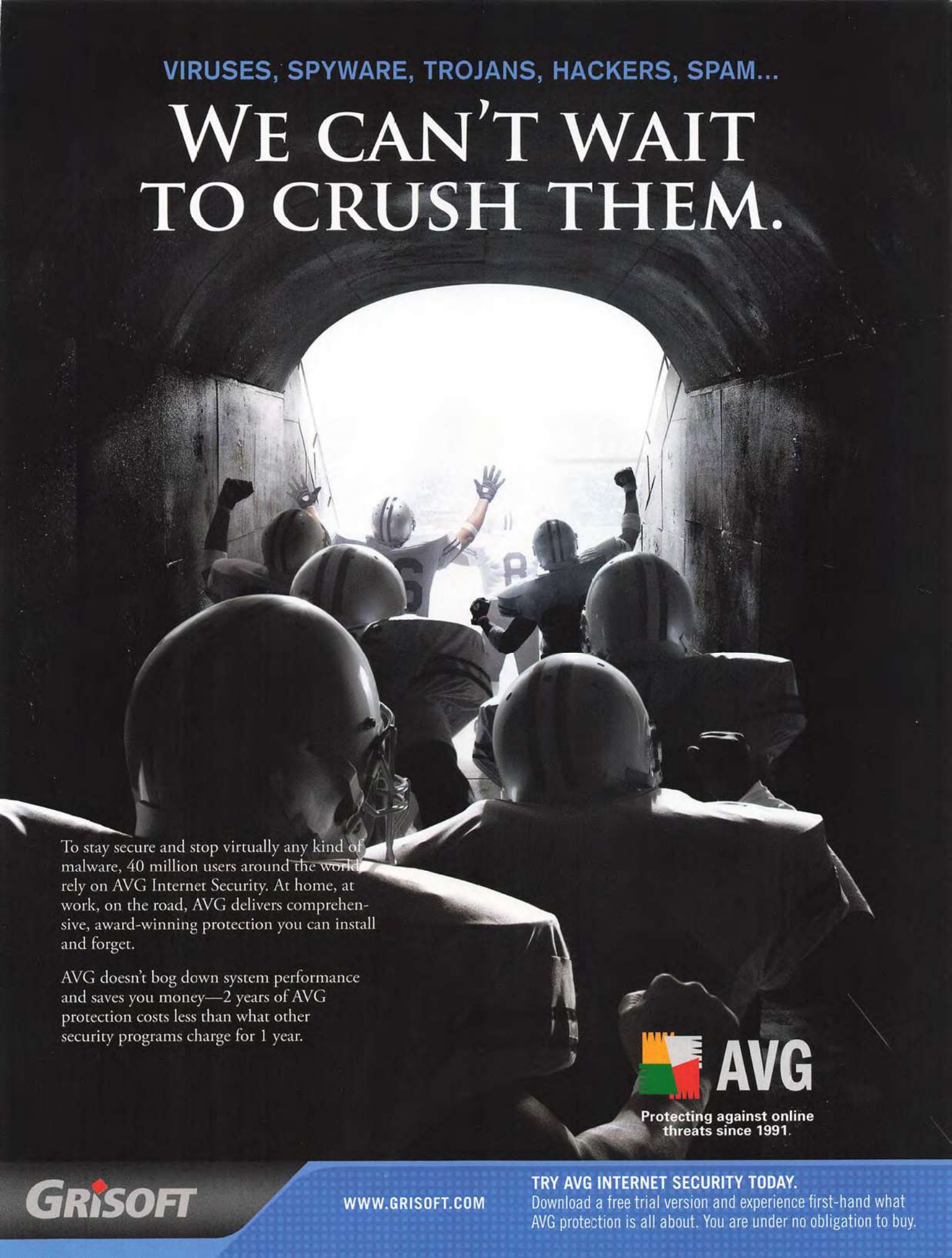


Jonathan Daniel/Getty Images

BERNARD BERRIAN, CHICAGO BEARS

ONE GAME ONE DREAM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Courtesy of Dolphin Stadium

STILL MAKING A SPLASH

Dolphin Stadium, the site of Super Bowl XLI, is a 75,000-seat, state-of-the-art, open-air facility famous as the first stadium of its kind to be constructed entirely with private funds. Opened in 1987 at a cost of $115 million, two decades later it remains a model for new sports and entertainment facilities across the country. The stadium is currently undergoing a $300 million makeover. The stadium, owned by H. Wayne Huizenga, is home to the NFL's Miami Dolphins and Major League Baseball's Florida Marlins.

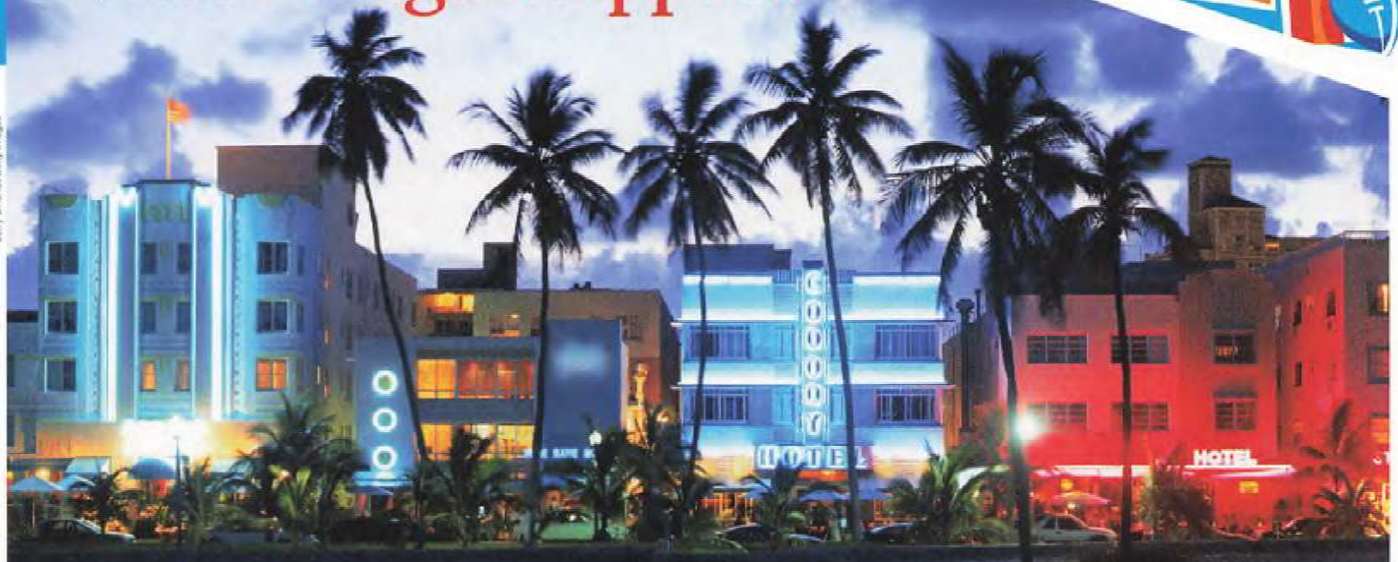
Initially called Dolphins Stadium during construction, it was renamed Joe Robbie Stadium (in honor of the then-team owner who led the fundraising effort) upon its opening and became known as Pro Player Stadium in 1996. Last April, as part of a wide-ranging rebranding and renovation program, it was renamed Dolphin Stadium. At the same time, two new hi-definition video display boards were unveiled, which are the largest in professional sports. Later in 2006, the world's longest contiguous LED fascia board was installed. The natural grass facility also boasts an advanced mechanical drainage system, ensuring a firm and dry playing surface minutes after receiving as much as three inches of rainfall in an hour.

Super Bowl XLI becomes the fourth Super Bowl played at Dolphin Stadium. It most recently hosted Super Bowl XXXIII between the Broncos and Falcons (a 34-19 Denver win in John Elway's final game). The game will return here in three years when Super Bowl XLIV is played at Dolphin Stadium in February 2010.

The facility seats 48,000 fans for baseball and has seen the Marlins capture a pair of World Series titles in their 14-year history. The stadium also is the site of the FedEx Orange Bowl, this year played between Louisville and Wake Forest. In 2009, Dolphin Stadium will host college football's national title game.

The music world's biggest names have been drawn here, too, starting with the 1988 triple-bill of Rod Stewart, Hall and Oates, and Chicago. More recently, both Paul McCartney and The Three Tenors have played here to capacity crowds.

Where magic happens...



Jerry Driendl/Getty Images

Spanning Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach Counties, scenic South Florida is home to more than five million residents and forms the largest metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. It also rates among the world's most culturally diverse regions, bringing together immigrants and languages from across the globe that capture America's "melting pot" spirit at its best.

Miami is the region's largest city. Known as the "Magic City," it is situated along Biscayne Bay and the Miami River, between the Florida Everglades and the Atlantic Ocean. Miami's population approaches 380,000, making it Florida's second-largest city behind Jacksonville. Nearby Broward County boasts 300 miles of navigable waterways and has earned the nickname "The Venice of America," while Palm Beach County offers 47 miles of beaches and is the location for more than 160 public and private golf courses.

Angelo Cavalli/Getty Images

The Tequesta Indians were first to reach this land more than 10,000 years ago, and Spanish explorers, led by Juan Ponce de León, "rediscovered" it in the 16th century. Seminole Indians and runaway slaves replenished the area's population in the 1800s, and in 1891 Julia Tuttle, who became known as the "Mother of Miami," purchased 600 acres of orange groves along the Miami River for her family. Within five years, she convinced builder Henry Flagler to construct a railroad into the town—extending his Florida East Coast Railroad from West Palm Beach—as well as to build a luxury hotel there. Free from the frost that can strike most parts of the state, the South Florida region enjoyed immediate growth as a residential, business, and tourist destination.

Possessing numerous ties to the Caribbean as well as to Central and South America, the area is now referred to as the "The Gateway of the Americas." Miami is home to the Latin American operations of many international corporations, including American Airlines, Cisco, Disney, Exxon, FedEx, Microsoft, Oracle, SBC Communications, and Sony. Its downtown area has the country's largest concentration of international banks. Miami also is called the "Cruise Ship Capital of the World," serving some 18 million passengers per year, and has one of the nation's busiest cargo ports, drawing nearly 10 million tons of cargo annually.

Tourism remains among the region's most important industries and the beaches of South Florida are world-renowned, while the Art Deco nightclub district in Miami's South Beach is regarded as perhaps the world's most glamorous. South Florida also is home to some of the most beautiful parks in the country, including: Crandon Park; Cape Florida State Recreation Area; Biscayne National Park; and Everglades National Park. With its subtropical climate, Miami's average February temperature is 69 degrees.

South Florida attracts many young adults, which is reflected in the many colleges and universities sprawled across the area—Barry, Florida Atlantic, Florida International, Johnson and Wales, Miami-Dade College, Nova Southeastern, St. Thomas, and the University of Miami among them.

Lester Lefkowitz/Getty Images

Several TV shows have been based in South Florida, including *Nip/Tuck*, *The Golden Girls*, and *CSI: Miami*. The area also has served as the backdrop for numerous movies—from 1960's *Where The Boys Are* to more recent releases *There's Something About Mary*, *The Birdcage*, and *Scarface*.

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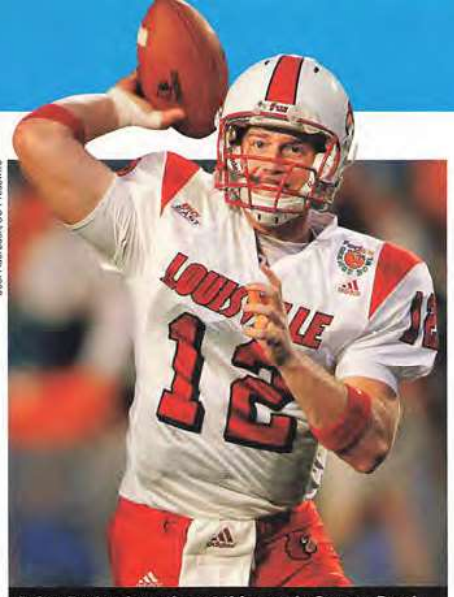

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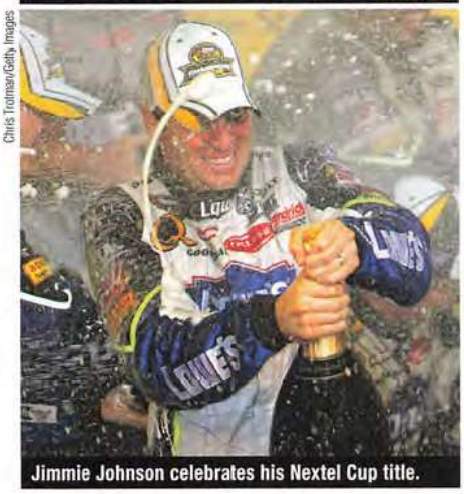
Brian Brohm in action at this year's Orange Bowl.



Chris Trotman/Getty Images

Jimmie Johnson celebrates his Nextel Cup title.

SIZZLING SPORTS

With its pro teams, tour stops, and college athletics, South Florida offers an array of sports entertainment that's unrivaled in the country.

The area is represented in each of the four major sports leagues—the Dolphins in the NFL, the Marlins in Major League Baseball, the Heat in the NBA, and the Panthers in the NHL. These teams have combined to win five league championships, with the Dolphins taking Super Bowl titles following the 1972 and 1973 seasons, the Marlins capturing the World Series in 1997 and again in 2003, and the Heat—with Dwyane Wade and Shaquille O'Neal—earning last season's NBA crown. The Panthers reached the NHL's Stanley Cup Finals in 1995-96.

South Florida also is the location for one of college football's most prestigious postseason games, the FedEx Orange Bowl, which has been in existence since 1935 and is now held at Dolphin Stadium. This year's game, played on Jan. 2, was won by Louisville over Wake Forest, 24-13.

The PGA Tour visits twice—for the Ford Championship at Doral (won the past two years by Tiger Woods) and the Honda Classic at The Country Club at Mirasol (won by Luke Donald in 2006). When the LPGA Tour introduced the first playoff system for professional golf, it culminated in November with the year's top 32 players participating in The LPGA Playoffs at Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach. The $1 million first-place check, the largest in the history of women's golf, went to Julieta Granada.

Pro tennis' Sony Ericsson Open draws top fields to the Tennis Center at Crandon Park and last year was won by Roger Federer (men) and Svetlana Kuznetsova (women). This year's tournament runs March 21-April 1. NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson clinched the 2006 Nextel Cup title with his finish at the Ford 400, held in November at the Homestead Miami Speedway.

Three Division I-A intercollegiate athletic programs—the University of Miami, Florida International, and Florida Atlantic—are located in the region. South Florida also is known for its world-class Jai-Alai, polo, and horse racing.

SUPER WELCOME!

Courtesy of Host Committee

Rodney Barreto

The South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee is thrilled to welcome fans to South Florida. This marks a record-tying ninth time the region is serving as the backdrop for the NFL's title game.

"Hosting a Super Bowl is a tremendous opportunity," says South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee Chairman Rodney Barreto. "South Florida's super tradition of hosting Super Bowls has allowed us to perfect our process, and the Host Committee is dedicated to making Super Bowl XLI an experience that surpasses all expectations."

From Monday's *A Salute to South Florida's Super Tradition* to *Super Saturday in the Sand*, Super Bowl week is sure to offer something for everyone. The game and events around it are expected to generate more than $350 million in total economic impact for the region.

The Host Committee also has worked closely with residents and businesses to showcase the region's pride and community spirit, efforts that led to more than 8,000 volunteers donating their time and efforts to ensure that Super Bowl XLI is a success.

REGISTERING A 10

"Come back and see us again!" is likely to be a common refrain heard by visitors to South Florida during Super Bowl week.

And the NFL—along with hundreds of thousands of football fans—will be doing just that. Super Bowl XLIV, scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 7, 2010, also is headed to Dolphin Stadium. It will mark the region's 10th Super Bowl, moving it past New Orleans as the host of the most Super Bowls.

The three-year interval between games marks the quickest return to a host city since Pasadena was the site of Super Bowls XIV and XVII.

"We're very excited about the opportunity to again show off South Florida," says Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga. "We love our city, and we love our area. We think the weather is the best, and that we have the best hotels, the best restaurants, the best beaches, and the best golf courses."

Yet the state of Florida won't even have to wait that long to get the game again. Super Bowl XLIII is scheduled for Tampa's Raymond James Stadium and will be played on Sunday, Feb 1, 2009.

Jamie Squire/Getty Images

EXPANDING IMPACT IS GOOD BUSINESS

As part of Super Bowl XLI, the NFL continued its efforts to increase opportunities for the region's minority- and woman-owned businesses.

Two highly effective programs formed the centerpiece of these efforts, one aimed at having an immediate impact surrounding the game and the other offering more lasting benefits.

In partnership with the South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee, the NFL's *Emerging Business Program* has helped increase opportunities for local minority- and woman-owned businesses relating to the Super Bowl.

Through the Business Resource Guide—an on-line listing of the certified minority- and woman-owned businesses in the community that are participating in the program—local firms were able to join in the bidding process for Super Bowl-related contracts.

As part of this initiative, the NFL hosted several informational seminars to provide these local companies with a basic overview to doing business with the league. The sessions included NFL speakers, entrepreneurs, and business instructors.

To further enhance learning and growth opportunities for the region's minority- and woman-owned businesses, the NFL and Sprint also held a series of educational workshops in the months leading up to the game. These workshops were designed to help businessmen and women increase their core business skills, attract new clients, and explore new ways to integrate technology into their operations.

A. Gort Photo & Video

Eight workshops were held in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties during the past two months, reaching thousands of businesses across several communities. These workshops were run in conjunction with the support of many minority chambers of commerce throughout South Florida.

ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS

The NFL, in partnership with the South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee, has established a series of initiatives aimed at keeping the Super Bowl and the host city cleaner and greener.

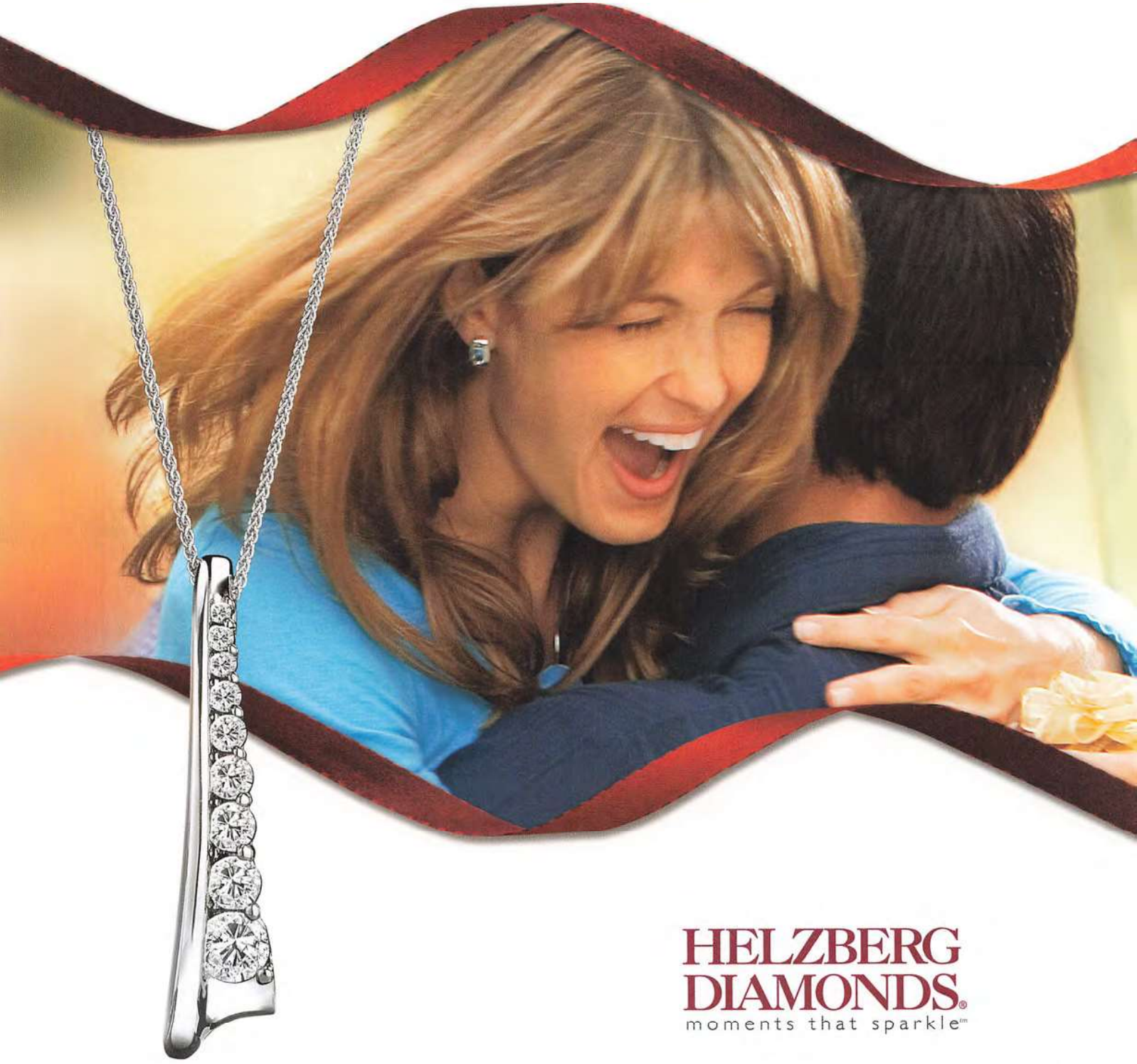
Here are highlights of these initiatives:

- Incorporating "green energy" offsets at the Super Bowl. Greenhouse gas emissions from energy usage at Dolphin Stadium will be offset by renewable energy credits supplied by Sterling Planet.
- The "Carbon Neutral" initiative, which supports the planting of hundreds of tree seedlings to offset greenhouse gas emissions produced by Super Bowl events. Working with its research partners, the NFL determined the amount of carbon dioxide produced by Super Bowl activities and the number of trees needed to absorb an equal amount of carbon dioxide.
- Donation of leftover decorative materials, building materials, office supplies, and other reusable items to local non-profit organizations. Thousands of items are being donated for reuse or for use as fundraising auction items.
- Comprehensive solid waste management projects at major NFL event facilities. This project diverts waste from landfills through recycling and reuse of materials.
- Donation of extra prepared food from Super Bowl events in partnership with Daily Bread Food Bank. As much as 60,000 pounds of food has been recovered and distributed at past Super Bowls.
- *Super Kids/Super Sharing* sports equipment and book donation project, developed in partnership with the Miami Dolphins, the Boys and Girls Clubs, and dozens of schools in South Florida. These programs give local youngsters a chance to be part of the Super Bowl by donating used items to underserved children in their own communities.
- A pilot project with local schools to create "Super School Tree Nurseries" and raise tree seedlings for up to two years until they are big enough to be permanently transplanted.

To learn more about these initiatives of the Super Bowl XLI Environmental Program, visit www.superbowl.com.

Courtesy of NFL Environmental Program

Score points off the field.



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ROGER THAT

On September 1, 47-year-old Roger Goodell officially replaced Paul Tagliabue as commissioner of the NFL. With his appointment, Goodell became just the fourth person to hold the post since 1946.

M. Spencer Green/AP WWP

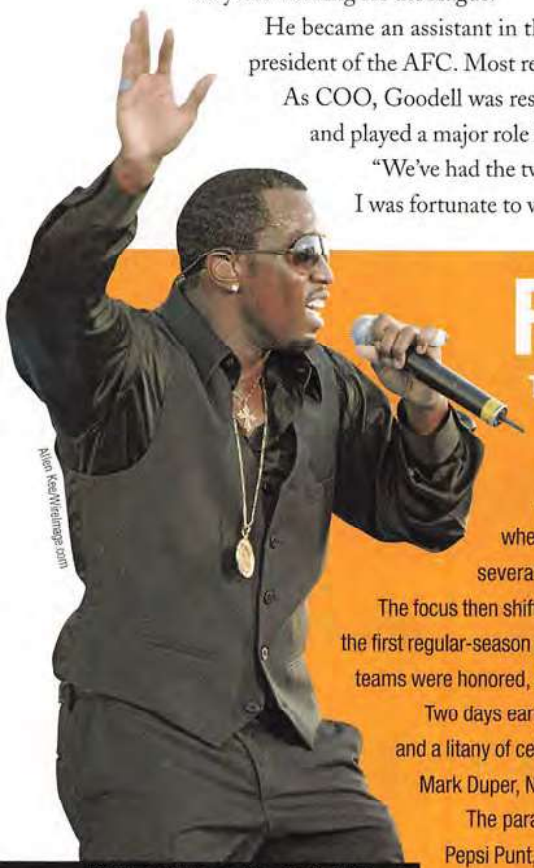
Commissioner Roger Goodell (left) with Paul Tagliabue

The son of former U.S. Sen. Charles Goodell of New York was raised in Bronxville, N.Y., and is a graduate of Washington & Jefferson College. Goodell joined the NFL offices in the fall of 1982 and, except for one season as an intern with the New York Jets, has spent the past 25 years working for the league.

He became an assistant in the NFL's public relations department in 1984 and three years later was appointed assistant to the president of the AFC. Most recently, he served as the league's chief operating officer, a position he assumed in 2000.

As COO, Goodell was responsible for the NFL's football operations and officiating. He also was in charge of NFL Ventures and played a major role in negotiating the new collective bargaining agreement that runs through 2011.

"We've had the two greatest commissioners in the history of professional sports, Paul Tagliabue and Pete Rozelle, and I was fortunate to work for both of them," says Goodell. "I look forward to the challenge ahead."



Allen Kee/AllenImage.com

Diddy performs on Miami's South Beach.

FROM THERE TO HERE

The NFL continued its tradition of starting the season by linking its defending champion with the site of the current year's Super Bowl. In 2006, that meant bringing the Steelers and South Florida together.

As part of *NFL Opening Kickoff 2006* on Thursday, Sept. 7, a huge concert took place on Miami's South Beach, where three-time Grammy winner Diddy was joined by Cassie, Tego Calderson, and DJ Riz. The free show attracted several thousand fans and portions of it were televised that night on NBC.

The focus then shifted to Pittsburgh's Heinz Field, where the Super Bowl XL champion Steelers were hosting the Miami Dolphins in the first regular-season game of the 2006 season. Prior to kickoff, Rascal Flatts performed, the Steelers' five Super Bowl championship teams were honored, and Martina McBride sang the national anthem.

Two days earlier, the *NFL Kickoff Parade* marched down Miami's Ocean Drive with a lineup of 34 NFL-branded GMC trucks and a litany of celebrities that included Pro Football Hall of Famers Marcus Allen and Anthony Muñoz, former Dolphins standout Mark Duper, NFL cheerleaders, and the stars of Telemundo Novela.

The parade led to Lummus Park, which became the site of the two-day *NFL Kickoff Celebration* that included an NFL Pepsi Punt, Pass & Kick event, youth football clinics, autograph signings, and a tailgate zone for fans.

HISTORY AT THE HALL OF FAME

Courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

Last August, Canton came calling for six NFL greats and one groundbreaking broadcaster.

Troy Aikman, Harry Carson, John Madden, Warren Moon, Reggie White, and Rayfield Wright were inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame at a celebration that attracted more than 19,000 fans. Also as part of the weekend, CBS Sports' Lesley Visser—a South Florida resident and emcee of the Super Bowl XLI Host Committee's Opening Ceremonies—became the first female recipient of the Pete Rozelle Radio-Television Award for her "longtime exceptional contributions to radio and television in professional football."

In 1976, Visser became the NFL's first female beat writer, covering the Patriots for *The Boston Globe*. She then spent seven years with ABC Sports and was the first female reporter for *Monday Night Football* and the first woman assigned to a Super Bowl sideline. At CBS, she has worked the Final Four, NBA Finals, World Series, Olympics, Triple Crown, and tennis' US Open. She continues as a feature reporter on CBS Sports' *The NFL Today* and will provide coverage from Super Bowl XLI.

"It is a tremendous honor to be connected with [Pete Rozelle's] legacy and to the list of honorees who have gone before me," says Visser.

Ron Wolfson/WireImage.com

EMMITT EARNS ANOTHER TITLE

Emmitt Smith is a three-time Super Bowl champion, was the MVP of Super Bowl XXVIII, and retired in 2005 as the NFL's all-time leading rusher.

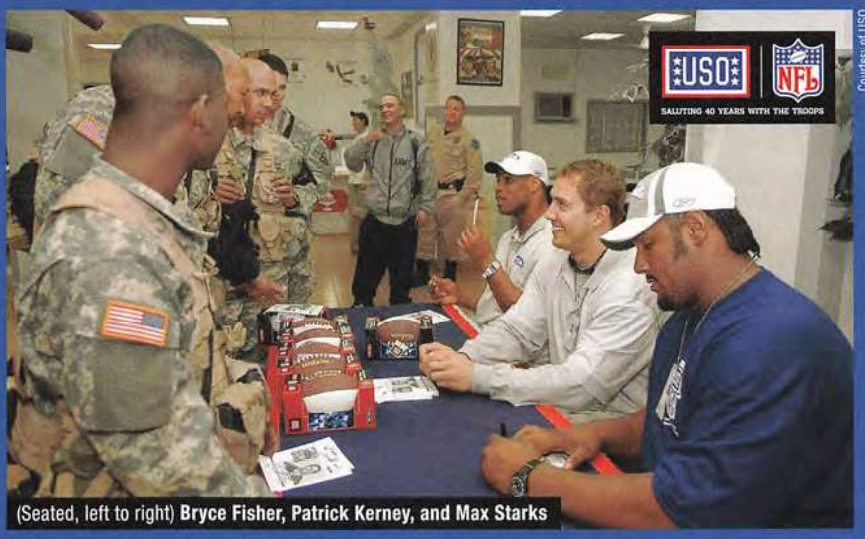
But as impossible as it may sound, his résumé grew even more impressive in November when he captured the title in the third season of ABC's *Dancing With The Stars*, partnering with ballroom dancer Cheryl Burke to defeat nine other teams.

"It is awesome," said Smith, upon being voted the champion by viewers. "We came a long way [to get to this point]; we really have."

The victory capped 16 weeks of training, 10 weeks of competition, and thousands of miles traveled for Smith, who never had formal dance lessons prior to the contest.

A Pensacola native who attended the University of Florida, Smith played 16 seasons in the NFL, the first 14 with Dallas. He totaled 18,355 rushing yards and scored 175 touchdowns.

TRUE TROOPERS



Courtesy of USO

(Seated, left to right) **Bryce Fisher, Patrick Kerney, and Max Starks**

In 2006, the NFL marked 40 years of its partnership with the USO with visits to American military troops stationed overseas.

Representatives of the NFL and USO (United Service Organizations) traveled to the Balkans and the Persian Gulf region last spring, providing a morale boost to troops there. Air Force Academy graduate Bryce Fisher of the Seahawks, Patrick Kerney of the Falcons, and Max Starks of the Super Bowl XL champion Steelers were all part of the tour.

Over Memorial Day weekend, the Eagles' Brian Dawkins and the Giants' Michael Strahan visited injured American troops at Germany's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center.

The NFL and USO initially joined forces in 1966 when the league began sending players to Vietnam and other parts of the Far East on "goodwill tours" to visit U.S. troops.

"The NFL's commitment to meet with and tell our military how appreciative and proud it is of them is clearly evidenced by the league's annual visits to military installations around the world," says Walter Murren, vice president of USO operations in Europe.

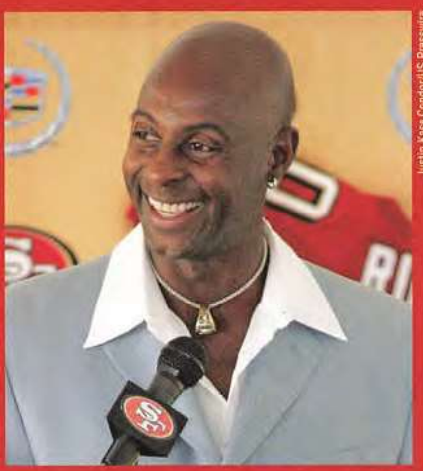
In 2004, the NFL donated $250,000 to build the Pat Tillman USO Center at the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, named in memory of the former Cardinals safety and Army Ranger who was killed in action. The Center opened in April 2005.

A REGAL SENDOFF FOR RICE

With his next route taking him straight to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, legendary wide receiver Jerry Rice officially retired this past season.

In August, the three-time Super Bowl champion and Super Bowl XXIII MVP signed a one-day contract with San Francisco, allowing him to end his NFL career with the team where he spent 16 of his 20 seasons. Then in November—flanked by many former teammates as well as former head coach Bill Walsh—Rice was honored at halftime of the 49ers' home game against Seattle. The weekend also included a dinner benefiting the 49ers Foundation, with proceeds directed to two of Rice's favorite charities: the School-To-College Program and Fresh Lifelines for Life.

"[San Francisco] is where I got my start," says Rice, a 13-time Pro Bowl selection who owns more than three dozen NFL records, among them the marks for career receptions (1,549) and touchdowns (197). "This is where my legacy is at. This is where my heart got started, and this is where I'm going to end it."



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WHAT MOVES U

The NFL and the American Heart Association have joined forces to create What Moves U, a campaign inspiring kids to become more physically active.

There has been an alarming rise in the rate of childhood obesity over the past 20 years as physical education programs have been cut from many of America's schools. *What Moves U* aims to break through this barrier and connect with kids and teens as part of their daily routines.

A major part of *What Moves U* is an interactive fitness-focused website which builds loyalty by offering youngsters the opportunity to win prizes—including trips to the Super Bowl and Pro Bowl.

In addition, the campaign recently delivered unique curriculum kits to nearly 25,000 middle schools throughout the country. Each kit contains lesson plans that allow teachers to incorporate physical activity into academic disciplines like math and science, as well as physical education.

The *What Moves U* campaign goal is to reach more than five million kids and teens this year alone. To learn more, please visit www.whatmovesu.com.

Kent Smith/Kent Smith Photography, LLC

Steve Smith and friends

A HEALTHY INITIATIVE

The NFL has teamed up with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and a coalition of 27 South Florida health and human services organizations to promote healthy nutrition and exercise through the "Super Bowl XLI Kickoff To Better Health" initiative.

Over the past several months, this fitness campaign has reached into low income and underserved communities to impact the lives of more than 50,000 people in South Florida.

Major components of the *Kickoff To Better Health* initiative have included four city-wide projects and scores of smaller, neighborhood-targeted programs. These programs have sought to provide South Florida residents with opportunities to participate in a variety of events and health screening activities, and teach families new and easy ways to stay healthy while inspiring them to kick off a new active lifestyle that includes a well-balanced diet and physical activity.

"The campaign's goal has been to host events that help raise public awareness about the importance of proper nutrition and healthy lifestyles," says NFL Director of Community Ventures Beth Colleton. "South Florida's hosting of the Super Bowl has generated excitement and created new opportunities to help spread the message to segments of the population disproportionately affected by obesity and related health problems."

SUPER BOWL XLI COMMUNITY IMPACT PROGRAM
Kickoff to Better Health
FITNESS • NUTRITION • HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Pregame. Postgame. None of it matters if you don't

BRING YOUR "A" GAME.

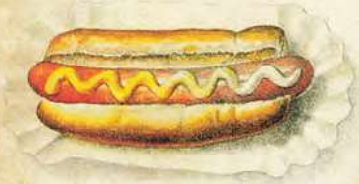

Fig. 1 Hot Dog

Fig. 2 Drumstick

Fig. 3 Cheeseburger

Fig. 4 Corn on the Cob

Fig. 5 Shish Kebab

Fig. 6 Rib Eye

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Go RVing.

GROWTH SPURT

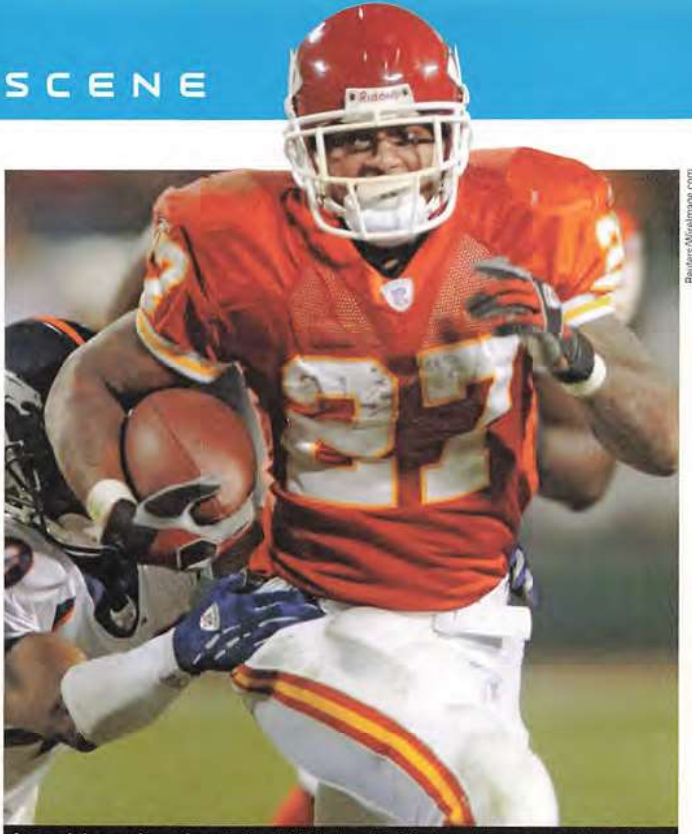
Turning three has meant big things for NFL Network.

When NFL Network, the first TV network fully dedicated to the NFL and the sport of football, turned three years old in November, it could look back and reflect on an amazing year of growth.

In 2006, the network began broadcasting live regular-season NFL games with an eight-game series that started Thanksgiving night when the Chiefs hosted the Broncos. Also added were three collegiate bowl games—the Insight Bowl, Texas Bowl, and the Senior Bowl—and *NFL Replay*, which showed edited versions of the four best games from the previous weekend. It all was part of more than 180 football games that NFL Network televised this past year.

In addition, the network provides full coverage of February's Scouting Combine, televises April's NFL Draft, and has introduced weekly college (*College Scoreboard*) and pro (*NFL GameDay*) highlight shows.

"This has been the most successful three years of any cable channel I have been a part of," says Steve Bornstein, NFL Network' s president and CEO. "We have just reached the tipping point of what we have planned."



Reuters/Wirelmage.com

Larry Johnson in action during NFL Network's first regular-season telecast.

Robert Laberge/Getty Images

IT'S IN THE CARDS

The Super Bowl heads to Glendale, Arizona, next year, with the 42nd edition of the NFL's big game slated for the recently opened University of Phoenix Stadium, home of the Arizona Cardinals.

The $465 million, 63,000-seat facility already has been voted one of the top 10 sports facilities in the world by *Business Week* magazine.

"Man, it's sweet," says Cardinals running back Edgerrin James. "It's everything you'd want in a stadium."

Designer Peter Eisenman wanted the outside of the stadium to resemble the barrel cactus that grows wild in parts of the state.

"We were determined to take what would be a symmetrical bowl and turn it into a distinctive shape," says Eisenman. "The shape has two iconic relationships—to the Native American mandala form, which you can see in the stadium, and to the barrel cactus form that is indigenous to the area."

Air-conditioned with a retractable roof, the facility has a natural grass surface that rests on a tray outside the stadium and is rolled in and locked into place for games. It is the first field of its kind in North America.

A CITY REBOUNDS

Barely a year after being ravaged by Hurricane Katrina and facing an uncertain future, New Orleans and its football team have made an amazing recovery.

The Saints repaired the Superdome in time for the 2006 season and then sold out the entire home schedule for the first time ever, helping ensure the franchise's long-term viability in the city. It also was one of the most successful seasons on the field for the Saints, who finished 10-6, won the NFC South title, and returned to the NFL playoffs for the first time in six years.

Also rebounding from Katrina has been the NFL-YET Boys & Girls Club New Orleans Center. In the hurricane's aftermath, more than three feet of water stood outside the facility.

Saints players were among those who helped in cleaning and gutting out the facility and discarding the destroyed equipment. Renovations began over the summer, and the Saints presented the Center with a check for $100,000 to assist those efforts.

Chris Graythen/Getty Images

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RED ZONE
DEEP CLEANSING
ACTIVE MICRO BEAD
FORMULA

RINGTHEBELL77 on Archive.org

SEEING SOUTH FLORIDA

With its many unique sections and extensive cultural diversity, a trip to this part of the Sunshine State provides visitors a world of discovery and enjoyment. Here is a sampling of the region's flavor:

- **Miami Metrozoo** (www.miamimetrozoo.com) is situated in the Kendall area of the city and is rated one of the top 10 zoos in the United States. The 300-acre cageless facility showcases more than 1,300 animals, representing more than 400 species.
- **Lion Country Safari** (www.lioncountrysafari.com) in West Palm Beach features more than 300 acres of animals, rides, games, and thrills. Visitors can enjoy a four-mile drive-through safari where they'll see a thousand free-roaming animals of more than 100 species.
- **Miami Seaquarium** (www.miamiseaquarium.com) in Key Biscayne provides 38 acres of entertainment, shows, and exhibits. It is the home of Lolita the Killer Whale and TV superstar Flipper.
- **Parrot Jungle** (www.parrotjungle.com) is among South Florida's newest attractions. Visitors can walk through the wilds of the park while surrounded by tropical foliage and encounter exotic animals like a 2,000-pound crocosauras and a liger (part lion, part tiger).
- **Florida State Parks** (www.floridastateparks.org) are rich with wildlife and allow visitors to take guided tours as well as canoe, airboat, walk, or ride through these natural wonders. South Florida parks include: Anne Kolb Nature Center and West Lake Park in Hollywood; Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park in Key Biscayne; John U. Lloyd Beach State Park in Dania; and Oleta River State Park in North Miami.
- **Everglades National Park** (www.nps.gov/ever) in Homestead is the third-largest national park in the continental United States, encompassing 1.5 million acres of rare ecosystems.
- **Schnebly Redland's Winery** (www.schneblywinery.com) is set in the Redland countryside and offers tours and wine tasting. It is the southern-most winery in the continental United States.
- **Art Deco Historic District** (www.mdpl.org) in Miami Beach is the nation's largest 20th Century National Register Historic District. The area encompasses more than 800 historic buildings erected in the 1920s and 1930s and contains a variety of architectural styles.
- **Lighthouses** (www.floridastateparks.org/www.lrhs.org) have been part of South Florida's landscape since the 1800s. The Cape Florida Light in Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park and the Jupiter Inlet Lighthouse on Jupiter Island offer tours and have spectacular views.
- **Monastery of St. Bernard de Clairvaux** (www.spanishmonastery.com) was built in Segovia, Spain, in 1141 and is the oldest building in the Western Hemisphere. Its pieces were brought to America, and in 1952 the monastery was reconstructed in North Miami Beach.
- **Bayside Marketplace** (www.baysidemarketplace.com) is a relaxed dining, entertainment, and retail complex located on Biscayne Bay, featuring more than 150 shops, restaurants, and bars.
- **The Downtown Miami Shopping District** (www.downtownmiami.com) can be found on historic Flagler Street and includes hundreds of shops along with art and historical museums. This area also is the destination for world-class jewelry shopping.
- **The Miami Children's Museum** (www.miamichildrensmuseum.org) features hundreds of bilingual, interactive exhibits for families.

Dan Forer/Corbis

Miami Children's Museum

Parrot Jungle

Lee Snider/Corbis

St. Bernard de Clairvaux

Richard Cummins/Corbis

Bayside Marketplace

Lighthouse at Cape Florida State Park

Miami Seaquarium

A WEEK IN THE SUN

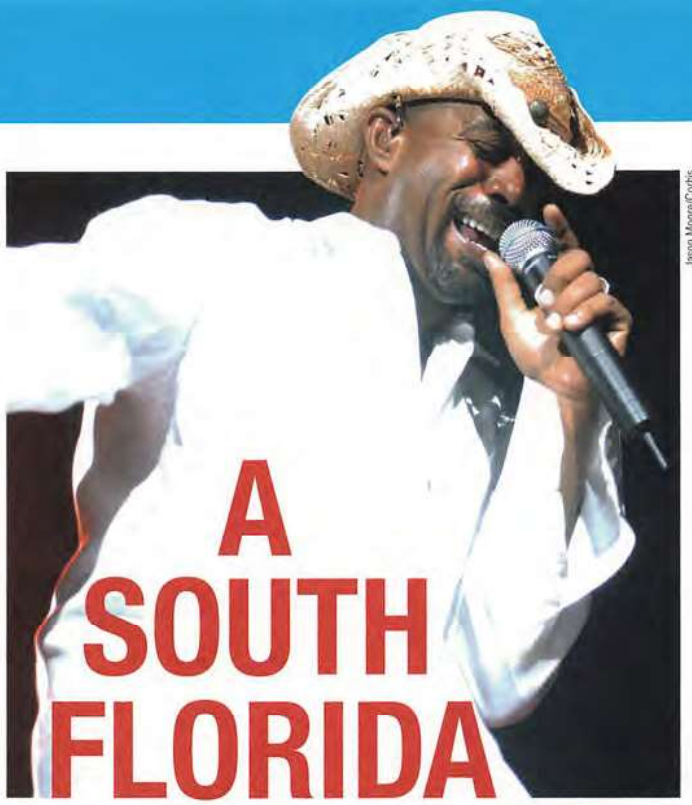
A full calender of events is on tap to entertain fans coming to South Florida for Super Bowl XLI. Most of those shown below are free. For a complete list, visit www.superbowl.com.

- **"Super" Clematis by Night** is scheduled for Feb. 1 and features a fountain-side concert, food, and sidewalk shopping along Centennial Square in West Palm Beach. It runs 5:30 p.m.-9 p.m.
- **Motorola Mile at South Beach** takes place Feb. 1-4, when Ocean Drive is open to pedestrian-only traffic (between 5th and 15th streets). It will feature kiosks with photos and stories from the first eight Super Bowls played in South Florida. There also will be an interactive football field, and NFL stars—past, present, and future—are scheduled to make appearances.
- **Ocean Drive Magazine's Volleypalooza** on Feb. 3 will attract the top models from around the world for a volleyball tournament on Miami Beach (8th Street and Ocean Drive) from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
- **Super Saturday in the Sand** takes place on Feb. 3 at Hollywood Beach, with flag football, Kids' Zone, KC and the Sunshine Band in concert, Beauties on the Beach Challenge (with NFL cheerleading squads), and more. The event begins at 10 a.m. and runs until 12 midnight. Tickets are $15 in advance and $20 at the gate. Call (954) 921-3271 for information and tickets.
- **Super Saturday Blast** and the **Super Saturday Night Spectacular** take place together on Feb. 3 at Miami's Bicentennial Park, starting at 5 p.m. It will be highlighted by a pep rally and performances by Frankie Beverly, the rock band Styx, and popular Latin recording artist Willy Chirino. The show will conclude with a spectacular fireworks display over Biscayne Bay.
- **Super Sunday Brunch** happens on Feb. 4 from 11 a.m.-2 p.m., poolside at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel. The interactive event will have a Chalk Talk session, games, NFL cheerleaders, former NFL players, and great food. Tickets are priced at $150 per person. For information, call (954) 966-6300 x1295.

Julius Gregorio
Volleypalooza

Rahsaan Nehaul/Getty Images
Styx

Johnny Nunez/WireImage.com
Frankie Beverly


Jason Moore/Corbis

A SOUTH FLORIDA SALUTE

Super Bowl week begins with a sensational opening-night affair.

A Salute to South Florida's Super Tradition **takes place on Monday, Jan. 29, at the Seminole Hard Rock Live Arena in Hollywood, Florida.**

CBS Sports' Lesley Visser emcees the four quarter-themed event, where she'll be joined by the two Super Bowl head coaches, past and present members of the Miami Dolphins, and prominent players from the previous eight Super Bowls held in South Florida, including several game MVPs.

The evening's entertainment features the blues-rock band Hootie & the Blowfish, who will perform at "halftime." Since 1994, the quartet of lead singer Darius Rucker (pictured), Mark Bryan, Dean Felber, and Jim Sonefeld has sold more than 25 million records worldwide and captured two Grammy Awards.

"Hootie & the Blowfish is a terrific fit for the Host Committee's Opening Ceremonies event," says Michael Kelly, South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee president. "The band is renowned for music that gets people energized and excited, plus they have great ties to football."

A VIP dinner is set for 7 p.m., followed by the 8:45 p.m. show. Tickets for the entire night—which includes dinner, show, and a commemorative art piece by famed pop artist Charles Fazzino—are available through the South Florida Super Bowl XLI Host Committee at (305) 626-7341. Tickets for the show only can be purchased at the Hard Rock Live box office at (954) 797-5531, at any Ticketmaster location, or by visiting www.ticketmaster.com. Show-only prices are $150, $100, and $50.

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Miami-Dade Parks

REACHING ACROSS COMMUNITIES

The sights, sounds, and ethnic diversity of South Florida are coming to life through multicultural outreach programs during Super Bowl week.

They all are part of the NFL's Community Impact program, a major facet of the Super Bowl each year. The NFL works with local organizations to develop programs focusing on the education, advancement, and leadership of both racial and gender minorities in the host city.

Super Bowl XLI Nations In Rhythm
John U. Lloyd State Park on Dania Beach ■ Jan. 27 ■ 5 p.m.

Blending the many faces of Broward County, the pulsating rhythms of Caribbean and Latin music will fill the air at John U. Lloyd State Park on Dania Beach, on Saturday, Jan. 27. It's all part of the *Nations in Rhythm* concert, Super Bowl XLI's opening event for the NFL's week of official celebrations leading up to game day.

Starting at 5 p.m., the beach will come alive with a variety of local Latin and Caribbean performing and visual artists. Music, dance, and art aimed at Southern Florida's Hispanic (Cuban, South American, Central American, Puerto Rican, and other Latin countries) and Caribbean (Haitian, Jamaican, Dominican Republic, Bahamian, and other Caribbean countries) residents will be the focus of the event.

The main stage entertainment starts at 8 p.m. Opening the nighttime show is a variety of top-caliber Latin acts that will include capoeira dancers, berimbau musicians, lambada, salsa, frevo, samba, and other dancers and musicians. The Caribbean will be represented by junkanoo, calypso, soca, rake, and scrape acts.

Headlining the evening will be the artistry of Latin Grammy winner and Grammy nominee Nestor Torres and his orchestra. Adored locally and renowned internationally, the flautist is a highly respected jazz recording artist who recently completed an Asian tour. For his final number, Torres and his orchestra will lead the crowd along the beach for the area's largest conga line.

Miami-Dade Parks

Nestor Torres

The Journey: A Tribute to Black History Month
Miami-Dade County Auditorium ■ Jan. 31 ■ 8 p.m.

Super Bowl XLI The Journey: A Tribute to Black History Month features the music and dance traditions found in the cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora while showcasing local musicians, dancers, vocalists, and artists. The show includes a retrospective look at the contributions of Africans, people of the Afro-Caribbean, and African-Americans to the performing arts of South Florida. It will highlight dance and music of West Africa, the Caribbean, and the rich traditions that began in the New World such as Gospel music, jazz, and hip hop. More than 100 local artists are participating.

Proceeds from ticket sales will support the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center scholarship fund to provide full tuition for students in need to attend after-school and summer arts programs. Tickets are available through www.ticketmaster.com.

Super Bowl XLI Minority Business Forum
Nova Southeastern University ■ Feb. 1 ■ 8 a.m.

The *Super Bowl XLI Minority Business Forum* is a by-invitation event that will include a business roundtable and town hall meeting for small minority- and woman-owned businesses. The program will examine business practices of those "from small business person to multi-million dollar corporate leader," with Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga and former NFL star and HBO *Inside The NFL* anchor Cris Carter among those slated to speak.

The town hall meeting will discuss practices and strategies that support small business success, examine best practices for businesses working to secure corporate contracts, and address issues that make profit and growth difficult for independent business owners.

The meeting also will open a dialogue between small business owners in South Florida and industry experts who specialize in business growth and development, market research, and planning.

EXPERIENCE THE FUN

The NFL Experience Built By The Home Depot, pro football's interactive theme park that annually precedes the Super Bowl, is set for Jan. 27-28 and Feb. 1-4 in the parking lot adjacent to Dolphin Stadium.

Photos courtesy of the NFL

Spanning nearly 850,000 square feet and featuring more than 50 interactive games and attractions, the NFL Experience will undoubtedly entertain the entire family by allowing fans of all ages the opportunity to enjoy the atmosphere surrounding Super Bowl XLI, whether they have a ticket to the game or not.

Proceeds from ticket sales are being donated to the NFL/Youth Education Town initiative, which builds multi-faceted educational and recreational facilities designed to improve the academic, physical fitness, and job-related skills of at-risk youth.

"The NFL Experience Built By The Home Depot is designed to offer fans the opportunity to be part of the excitement of Super Bowl XLI. It is a celebration of football for fans in South Florida, as well as visitors throughout the state," says Frank Supovitz, the NFL's senior vice president of events. "It provides everybody a chance to participate in the game of football, while at the same time helping the community by generating charitable funds."

Fans may test their skills in a variety of attractions, including "The Drive," where they can experience the ultimate in resistance training as they struggle to score a touchdown while harnessed to a bungee cord, and "Quarterback Challenge," where they can show off their passing accuracy on special targets in a challenge modeled after the televised competition of the same name. For those interested in testing their broadcasting skills, "Fantasy Play By Play" enables fans to announce great plays in NFL history. This year's NFL Experience also features a "Kids' Zone," offering games and attractions designed especially for the sport's youngest fans.

As part of the NFL Experience, fans can visit the Topps Super Bowl XLI Card Show as well as the Pro Football Hall of Fame NFL Throwbacks Exhibit, which showcases the spectacular visual history of the NFL with one-of-a-kind items on loan from the Pro Football Hall of Fame. There's also a 30,000-square foot NFL Experience Team Shop, featuring an extensive collection of NFL-licensed merchandise from all 32 teams.

Tickets to the NFL Experience may be purchased by calling (866)TIX-4NFL, online at www.superbowl.com, at the Dolphin Stadium box office, and at the gate (beginning Jan. 27). Tickets are $15 for adults and $10 for children 12 and under, and permit entry for a particular day and time. Tickets will be sold at the gate during operational days and hours only. On Sunday, Feb. 4, attendance is limited to those with Super Bowl XLI game tickets.

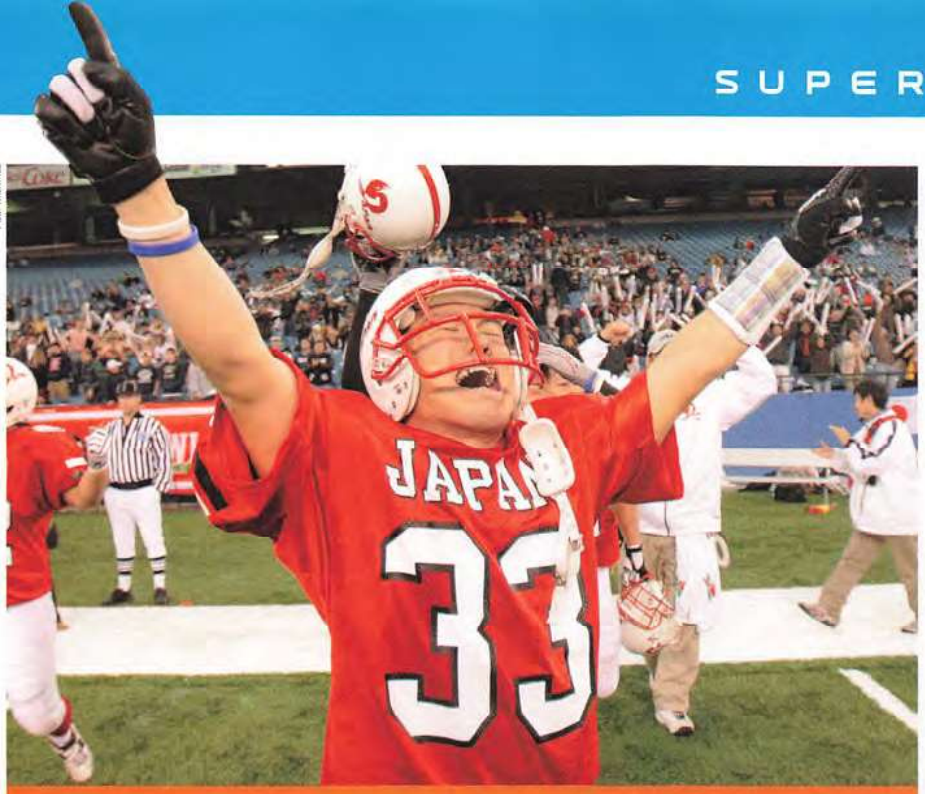
All activities at the NFL Experience are included in the price of admission. Fans may stay in the theme park as long as they like, but re-entry is not permitted.

AND FOR OUR YOUNG FANS

As part of Super Bowl week, NFL Youth Football Clinics take place on Jan. 27 at the Orange Bowl and on Jan. 28 at Fort Lauderdale's Lockhart Stadium.

Four clinics are scheduled for each day. More than 3,200 boys and girls ages 8-12 have been invited to participate, encompassing local elementary and middle schools, youth football programs, and community youth agencies and organizations.

Participants will learn football fundamentals, sportsmanship, and teamwork from NFL players and youth coaches. For more information on this and other NFL Youth Football programs, visit www.nflyouthfootball.com.



Paul Martinez

WATCH THE GAME'S NEXT GENERATION

The NFL Global Junior Championship **has become a staple of Super Bowl week. This year's youth football world champion will be crowned at Lockhart Stadium in Fort Lauderdale on Feb. 3.**

Teams representing six countries and three continents battle for the prestigious NFL Global Junior Championship XI on Wednesday, Jan. 31 (12 noon to 10 p.m.) and again on Saturday, Feb. 3 (8.30 a.m. to 6 p.m.). Tickets cost only $5 per day. Miami Dolphins Pro Bowl defensive end Jason Taylor is the tournament's honorary chairman and will perform the coin toss before the championship game.

Such is the global reach of football that 16- to 19-year-olds from as far away as Asia, Central America, and Europe can now compete on the gridiron with the best North America has to offer. Since Mexico won the inaugural tournament in 1997, Europe, the United States, and two-time reigning champion Canada all have claimed the coveted gold medal. Canada blanked Team USA, 10-0, in last year's title game.

This year, a team of student-athletes from schools in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties will represent Team USA Football under head coach Mark Guandolo from Chaminade-Madonna Preparatory School in Hollywood, Fla. Only students who posted a minimum 2.5 GPA through their junior year are eligible as the event continues to reward academic excellence.

"It's a real honor for our local players to be invited to participate in this event," says Guandolo. "It is a unique and interesting experience to meet players and coaches from foreign countries on the football field."

Joining Team USA to complete this year's field are Canada, France, Japan, Mexico, and Panama.

Visiting players get to enjoy the cultural experience of living with host families from Cardinal Gibbons, Pine Crest, Western, University School, and North Broward Prep during their week-long stay in South Florida for the tournament.

For more information on the NFL Global Junior Championship and the event's history, visit www.NFL-GJC.com.

WHOLE NEW BALL GAME

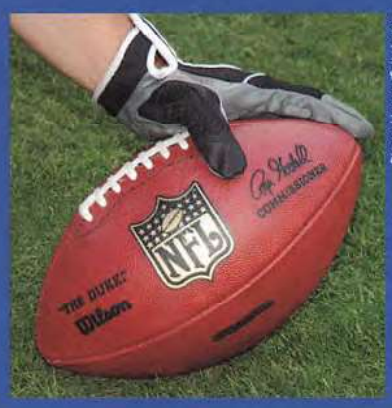
In 2006, NFL teams approved a recommendation to change the name of the league's game ball back to "The Duke" in honor of late N.Y. Giants owner Wellington Mara.

Mara, named after the Duke of Wellington, was given that nickname by Giants players as a youngster when his father owned the team.

"The Duke" was used by the league from 1941-69, but was discontinued following the 1970 AFL-NFL merger. The new ball bearing the signature of Commissioner Roger Goodell is made by Wilson at its factory in Ada, Ohio, a tradition that dates back to 1941.

With the introduction of the new ball and the appointment of a new commissioner, USA Football—the youth football advocacy organization founded by the NFL and the NFL Players Association—distributed 5,000 game footballs with the signature of Paul Tagliabue to high schools. An emphasis was placed on Gulf Coast schools recovering from Hurricane Katrina, and balls also were distributed to international football programs.

This outreach effort came as part of Play Football Month (Aug. 15-Sept. 15), which was created to celebrate the beginning of football season at all levels. Also as part of Play Football Month, USA Football awarded $525,000 in equipment grants to eligible youth leagues, and NFL teams donated more than 100,000 preseason game tickets to youth organizations and military personnel.



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Picture simulated. [1]Best-selling based on market data from the NPD Group for consumer plasma displays during the period 9/04–7/06. [2]Compared to our previous models.

Courtesy of Habitat for Humanity

REBUILDING LIVES & HOPE

Rebuilding Together, Habitat For Humanity, and the NFL have joined forces to rehabilitate homes in Miami and perform repair work at the Broward County Boys & Girls Club during Super Bowl week.

In its 12th year, *Kickoff To Rebuild* is an annual project aimed at renewal in the Super Bowl host city. Former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and his wife, Chan, serve as honorary co-chairs. Current and former NFL players assist in the work that is performed during Super Bowl week.

Rebuilding Together is the nation's largest volunteer organization whose mission is to preserve and revitalize low-income houses, non-profit organizations, and communities. By the end of 2006, the organization had rehabilitated more than 105,000 homes and nonprofit facilities. All repairs are free of charge to the homeowners who receive help. To learn more about the organization's efforts in South Florida and across the country, please visit www.rebuildingtogether.org.

In that similar spirit, Habitat For Humanity of Greater Miami is building 10 houses in two weeks as part of *Blitz Build 2007*.

These efforts are focusing on the James E. Scott and Carver communities within North Miami's Liberty City, where Miami Habitat is working to house some of the displaced residents of two demolished public housing projects. By replacing these apartment complexes with 52 single-family homes, Miami Habitat will bring a new face to an inner city community in need of transformation.

Since its inception in 1989, Miami Habitat has built 560 houses in Miami-Dade County. It is one of 2,000 Habitat affiliates nationwide. For more information, visit www.habitat.org.

YETS NET IMPROVEMENTS

Since 1993, as part of the Super Bowl legacy program, the NFL's Youth Education Town (YET) initiative has constructed educational and recreational centers for youth living in at-risk neighborhoods in Super Bowl host cities and in Honolulu, site of the NFL Pro Bowl.

YET centers offer tutoring, mentors, career training, arts & crafts centers, social and recreational game rooms, gymnasiums and athletic fields, and community meeting rooms. In South Florida, the NFL already has built two YET centers, the first in Miami-Dade County (opened in 1996) and the second in Broward County (opened in 2000). In 2005, the centers combined to serve more than 3,000 young people.

This year, the NFL has donated $500,000 to each center for the addition of state-of-the-art multimedia areas, with all equipment donated by the Forever Young Foundation (run by Pro Football Hall of Famer Steve Young). These multimedia areas will offer youngsters an opportunity to connect to the arts and music like never before, with recording studios, graphic design stations, and access to advanced software technology.

The South Florida YET facilities, among 15 YET Centers across the country, not only provide immediate increased learning opportunities, but also give kids the opportunity to learn skills that will better prepare them for college and the work force.

In addition to the two centers in South Florida, Tampa has two YETs and Jacksonville began construction on its YET last year.

Courtesy of the NFL

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Chef Allen Susser helped set World Table on course.

SUPER BOWL XLI WORLD TABLE

The *Super Bowl XLI World Table* is a diversity program for young people that has combined the power of celebrity chefs and the NFL to inspire teens.

Its goal is to tackle two key issues: understanding and dealing with diversity, and fighting obesity through improved nutrition and increased activity.

To kick off this unique program, Miami's own celebrity chef, Allen Susser, led an effort to secure the support of nationally recognized chefs Michelle Bernstein, Michael Schwartz, and Carmen Gonzalez to conduct a four-week series of cooking classes designed to celebrate South Florida's diversity—both its food and its people—while empowering and educating teens to make healthy food choices.

The classes are a modified version of Operation Frontline's "Power of Eating Right," a curricula for teens that teaches cooking, nutrition, and food safety. These classes will be followed by the program's second part, the University of Miami's Overtown Project, which has doctors from the school creating and teaching healthier recipes and meals for soul food afficionados. Brought together by the NFL, these two programs are working to serve more than 750 young people in their communities and at in-school culinary classes during 2007.

The New York Times has called Susser the "Ponce De León of New Florida cooking." His restaurant, Chef Allen's, has placed first in the Zagat survey for Best Restaurant for Food in Miami four years in a row, including 2005.

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING℠

America's teens have turned Super Bowl Sunday into the nation's largest youth-led day of giving and service.

On Super Bowl Sunday, teens all across the country—armed with soup pots—will take up collections for hunger relief by visiting churches, schools, and businesses and asking for $1 donations.

One-hundred percent of the money raised goes directly to local food banks and other charities as selected by each group. More than 11,000 organizations led last year's effort, raising in excess of $5 million.

In addition to collecting donations, young people are encouraged to serve hands-on at the charity of their choice on the Saturday before the Super Bowl.

Souper Bowl of Caring is at work in all 50 states and has given more than $33 million to neighbors in need. To learn more, visit www.souperbowl.org.

A TASTY TIME

***Taste of the NFL*, the premier food and wine-tasting extravaganza taking place during Super Bowl weekend, is now in its 16th year.**

Acclaimed as the "Party with a Purpose," the event raises awareness and dollars in the fight against hunger for millions of people who struggle every day to simply feed their children. The nation's finest chefs—representing each NFL city—as well as NFL legends, both past and present, volunteer their time.

This year's Taste of the NFL takes place on Feb. 3 at the Greater Fort Lauderdale-Broward County Convention Center. VIP tickets (allowing for 6 p.m. entry) cost $600; guest tickets (7 p.m. start) are priced at $500. Corporate tables also are available.

Attendees may sample specialty foods, meet the chefs, and get photos and autographs from players and celebrity guests. The evening includes a silent auction and entertainment.

Funds from Taste of the NFL are distributed to hunger relief agencies throughout the country, including America's Second Harvest, Food Research & Action Council (FRAC), Campus Kitchens, and Community Kitchens. To learn more, visit www.tasteofthenfl.com.

Courtesy of Taste of the NFL

FOR A SMASHING GOOD TIME

Courtesy of Sony Music

John Legend

The NFL and Pepsi are teaming up to present the *Pepsi Smash Super Bowl Concert Series*, a dynamic fusion of the best in music and football.

The two shows—on Feb. 1 and Feb. 2—take place live at the NFL Experience outside Dolphin Stadium.

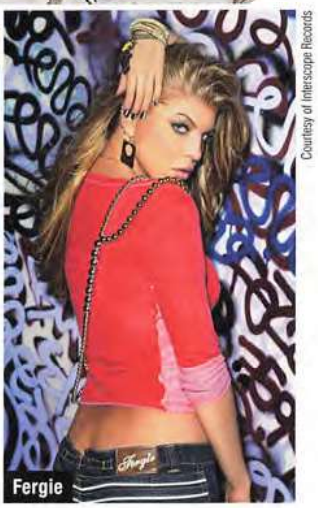
The Thursday show is headlined by Grammy Award-winner Kanye West. Fergie and John Legend also will perform. The concert begins at 8 p.m. and will air on VH1 on Feb. 3 at 10 p.m. (9 p.m. Central).

Friday's concert slides into a Latin groove as Ivy Queen and Don Omar take to the stage along with "Bachata-boy band" Aventura. The show tapes live at 8 p.m. and airs on Telemundo on Feb. 3 at 4 p.m.

Tickets for both shows are available at www.ticketmaster.com.

John Shearer/Wireimage.com

Kanye West


Courtesy of Interscope Records

Fergie

NFL CHARITIES TO HOLD CELEBRITY BENEFITS

NFL Charities is hosting major golf and bowling charity events during Super Bowl week that will benefit the NFL's Youth Education Town initiative in South Florida.

The second annual *Super Bowl NFL Charities Celebrity Bowling Classic* takes place on Feb. 1 at Strike Miami. It is followed by the 22nd annual *Super Bowl NFL Charities Celebrity Golf Classic* on Feb. 3 at the Doral Resort and Spa. More than 600 people will participate in the two events and total proceeds are expected to exceed $250,000.

Both events will include former and current NFL players—among them members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame—heading up teams of amateur bowlers and golfers. These events are open to participants only. For more information, call (201) 489-0049.

In addition, the NFL and United States Bowling Congress are hosting 30 inner-city youngsters on Jan. 31 for a bowling clinic at Strike Miami. The youngsters will be taught bowling basics by members of the Professional Bowlers' Association and then get to bowl with current and former NFL players. A similar clinic took place last year prior to Super Bowl XL in Detroit.

ANOTHER REASON TO CELEBRATE

The *Super Bowl Gospel Celebration*, now in its eighth year, is scheduled for Feb. 2 at the James L. Knight Center in Miami. The show gets underway at 8 p.m.

Always among the Super Bowl's most popular and talked-about events, the Gospel Celebration is a fusion of inspirational music from the biggest names in Gospel, soul-stirring testimonies from top NFL players, and surprise celebrity guest participation.

This year's musical lineup features Grammy winner Yolanda Adams, Fred Hammond, Hezekiah Walker, Jaci Velasquez, J Moss, and Tye Tribbett. Special host for the evening is Dr. Bobby Jones.

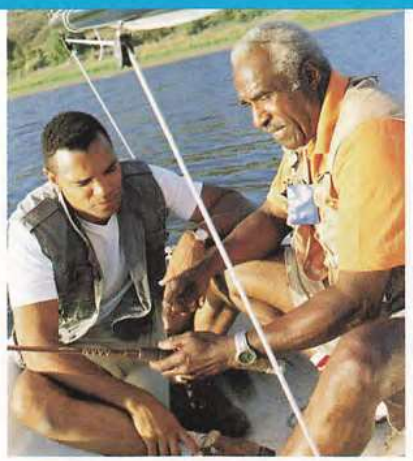
NFL players who have appeared at the Gospel Celebration include Kurt Warner, Cris Carter, Richard Seymour, Ray Lewis, Troy Vincent, and Deion Sanders.

Tickets are priced at $39-$75 and are available through www.ticketmaster.com.

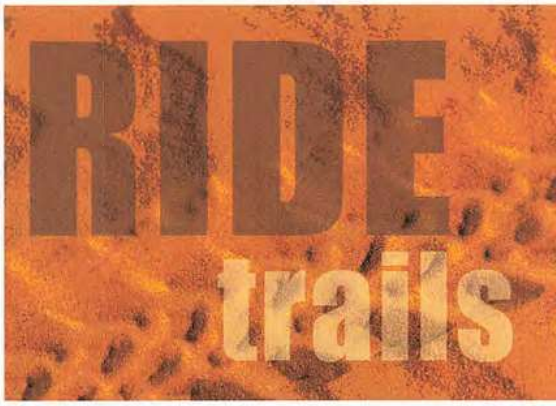
This year's benefiting charity is the Dr. Bobby Jones Gospel Complex for Education, Heritage, and Preservation that will be built in Fort Lauderdale. The complex will be the first of its kind to house artifacts, memorabilia, historical documents, and rare recordings of Gospel Music.

For more information on the show, visit www.superbowlgospelcelebration.com.

go ahead.



get outdoors.



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LIVE FROM SOUTH FLORIDA

NFL Network will be every football fan's "one-stop shop" for the most extensive live television coverage of the excitement surrounding Super Bowl XLI in South Florida.

Marshall Faulk (left), Rich Eisen, and Rod Woodson of NFL Network's *Total Access*.

Courtesy of NFL Network

During Super Bowl week, NFL Network is offering more than 50 hours of live "fly on the wall" Super Bowl coverage from multiple sites around the region, including the Miami Beach Convention Center, an oceanfront location on South Beach, the AFC and NFC team hotels, and the NFL Experience, located outside Dolphin Stadium.

On site will be Rich Eisen, Brian Baldinger, Terrell Davis, Jamie Dukes, Marshall Faulk, Kara Henderson, Steve Mariucci, Jim Mora, Deion Sanders, Adam Schefter, Sterling Sharpe, Solomon Wilcots, and Rod Woodson.

In addition to its regular programming, NFL Network will televise every NFL-related press conference live, including team arrivals, daily player media sessions, head coach press conferences, Commissioner Roger Goodell's Super Bowl press conference, the Pro Football Hall of Fame's announcement of its Class of 2007, and the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year Award.

The NFL Network series, *America's Game*, which counts down the top 20 Super Bowl champions, comes to its exciting conclusion during Super Bowl week. The top 10 teams, as voted by a blue ribbon panel of experts, are to be revealed from Jan. 27-Feb. 3.

In another Super Bowl-week first, NFL Network is airing four previous Super Bowls in their entirety featuring the original television broadcasts. This marks the first time in history that a network broadcast of a Super Bowl will be re-aired on television.

On Super Bowl Sunday, NFL Network is set to deliver a $3\frac{1}{2}$-hour pregame show with members of the *Total Access* team, as well as a two-hour postgame show. Both shows will originate live from Dolphin Stadium.

NFL.COM FANTASY 2006 GRAND PRIZE WINNERS

Congratulations to Anthony Vu, who captured the title in *NFL Home Team Challenge 2006*, a weekly salary-cap fantasy football game, and Josh Vogel, winner of the league-formatted *NFL Fantasy 2006* game. Both received VIP trips for two to South Florida to attend Super Bowl XLI.

Be sure to play NFL.com Fantasy next season, and you could win a VIP trip to Super Bowl XLII in Glendale.

NFL FANTASY 2006

NFL CHALLENGE 2007

COMMERCIALLY SPEAKING

For the first time, the NFL enabled fans to present their ideas for a Super Bowl commercial that best expresses the NFL experience.

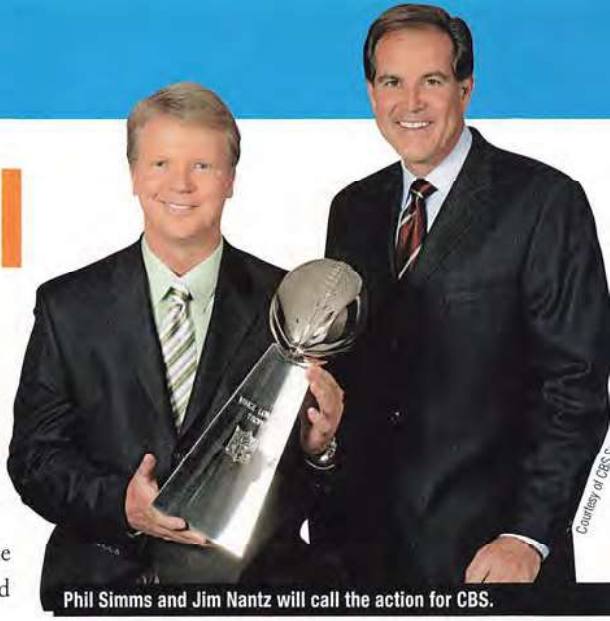
The winning entry from the campaign "Pitch us your idea for the best NFL Super Bowl commercial ever. Seriously." has been produced into an advertisement that will air during Super Bowl XLI.

Contest events took place at Giants Stadium, Texas Stadium, and Denver's Invesco Field, where 1,700 submissions were reduced to the 12 finalists. These taped pitches were then posted on www.nfl.com/superad, with the winning idea determined by a panel of judges and an online fan vote.

The winner, announced Jan. 8, was Gino Bona from Portsmouth, N.H, whose tagline was, "It's hard for us, too." Bona described several scenes of fans' reactions as the Super Bowl comes to an end and their struggle with the realization there would be no more regular-season games until next year.

Bona was invited to view the filming of the commercial and received a prize package that included round-trip airfare to South Florida and two tickets to Super Bowl XLI as special guests of the NFL.

SUPER BOWL XLI ON CBS SPORTS


Courtesy of CBS

Phil Simms and Jim Nantz will call the action for CBS.

CBS Sports culminates its 47th season of broadcasting the NFL with Super Bowl XLI. It is the network's 16th Super Bowl telecast.

The game brings an end to a year that featured 111 regular season broadcasts, an AFC Wild Card Playoff game, two Divisional Playoff games, and the AFC title game.

Jim Nantz and Phil Simms deliver the action from the broadcast booth. This marks Nantz's first time calling play-by-play for the Super Bowl, though he has hosted CBS' Super Bowl pregame show in 2001 and 2004. Simms provides analysis for his fifth Super Bowl, his third for CBS Sports. Nantz and Simms are being joined by sideline reporters Solomon Wilcots and Steve Tasker. Super Bowl XLI is produced by coordinating producer of the *NFL on CBS* Lance Barrow and is directed by Mike Arnold.

James Brown anchors *The Super Bowl Today* pregame show, starting at 2 p.m., live from Dolphin Stadium with co-hosts Dan Marino, Boomer Esiason, and Shannon Sharpe. Also contributing to the program are Lesley Visser, Dick Enberg, and Sam Ryan. Eric Mann is senior producer and Bob Matina is director of *The Super Bowl Today*.

CBS SPORTS

Sean McManus is president, CBS News and CBS Sports. Tony Petitti is executive vice president and executive producer, CBS Sports. McManus and Petitti serve as executive producers for the network's coverage of the NFL and Super Bowl XLI.

ON YOUR RADIO

Courtesy of Westwood One

Boomer Esiason and Marv Albert

WESTWOOD ONE

For the 20th straight year and 34th time overall, Westwood One is the exclusive network radio home of the Super Bowl.

Beginning at 5 p.m., more than 550 stations across America will carry Westwood One's broadcast of Super Bowl XLI. The *Monday Night Football* broadcast team of Marv Albert and Boomer Esiason call their fifth Super Bowl together while John Dockery and Bonnie Bernstein patrol the Dolphin Stadium sidelines. Jim Gray hosts the pregame, halftime, and postgame shows, and Tommy Tighe kicks off Westwood One's coverage with *Super Bowl Preview* at 3 p.m., followed by *Super Sunday* at 4 p.m. Howard Deneroff is executive producer of Super Bowl XLI on Westwood One.

With CBS Sports televising the game, Esiason is once again pulling double-duty on Super Sunday—serving as the lead analyst for Westwood One's radio broadcast while concurrently co-anchoring the pregame, halftime, and postgame shows on *The Super Bowl Today* set for television.

Westwood One is the nation's leader in play-by-play radio sports. Its other sports programming includes: Notre Dame football; NCAA football and basketball, including the Final Four; the NHL, including the Stanley Cup Finals; and the Masters.

SB XLI EN ESPAÑOL

Super Bowl XLI is being broadcast live to America's Spanish-speaking audience by Univision Radio, the NFL's Spanish radio partner. The *Monday Night Football* broadcast team of Rafael Hernandez Brito "El Alcalde" (play-by-play) and Clemson Smith Muñiz (commentary) delivers the action. Eduardo Martell hosts the network's pregame, halftime, and postgame shows.

Courtesy of Univision Radio

Rafa "El Alcalde" Smith Muñiz

UNIVISION Radio

WORLDWIDE COVERAGE

Super Bowl XLI is being shown in 232 countries and territories and heard in 34 languages.

A worldwide audience of 750 million to one billion people will be able to watch or listen to the Super Bowl. There are 19 TV and radio stations from 14 countries broadcasting the game on site.

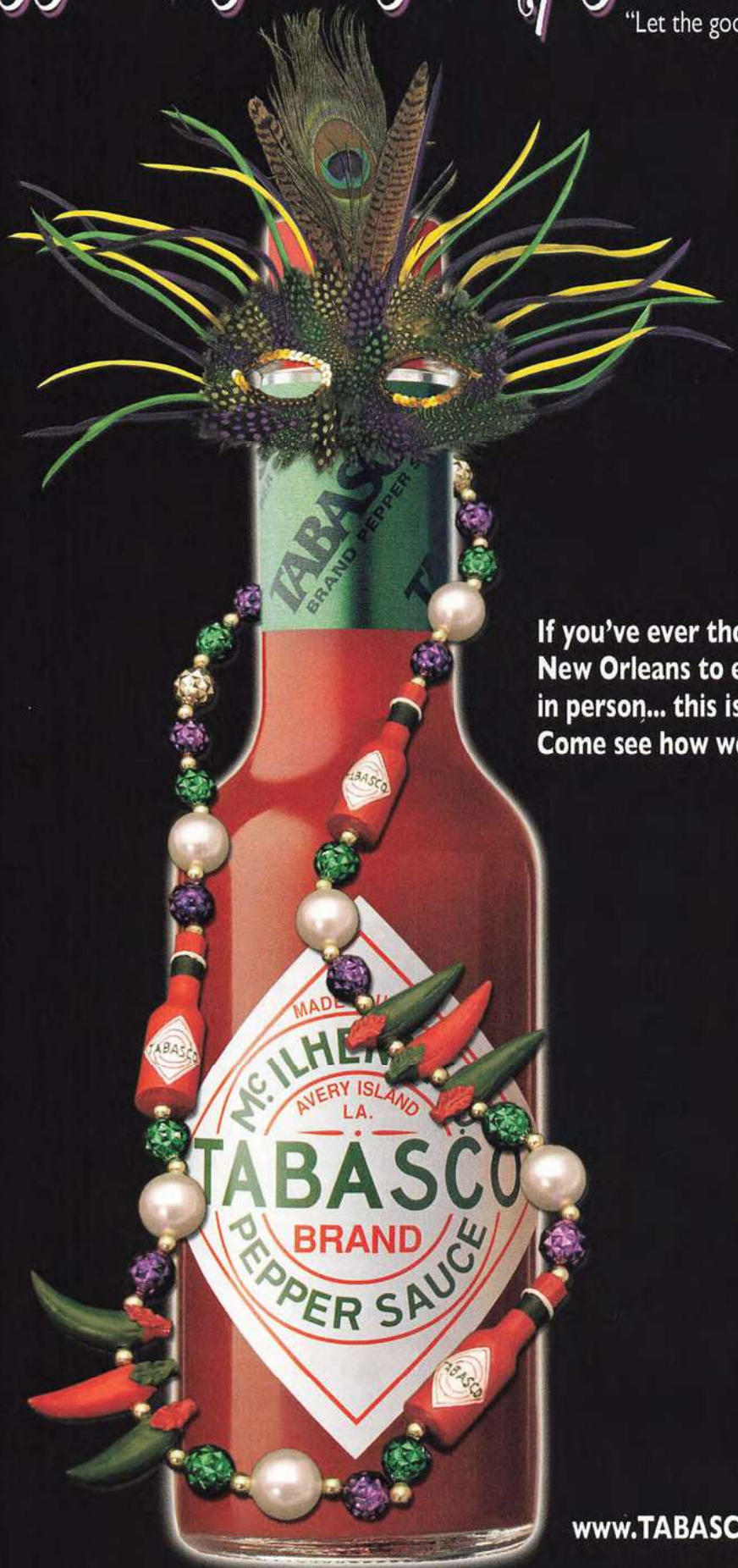
For the first time, the Super Bowl will be live on terrestrial TV in South Korea when SBS Media Net airs the action. China's CCTV, Dragon TV, and G+ Sports also are showing the game.

In Brazil, BandSports broadcasts Super Bowl XLI in Portuguese. The game is airing on two terrestrial networks in Germany: a live broadcast on ARD and a delayed broadcast on DSF.

NFL International again is providing a world feed in both standard and high definition for all international broadcast partners. English-speaking countries showing the game will hear Spiro Dedes and Sterling Sharpe call the action.

"Laissez les bons temps rouler"

"Let the good times roll"



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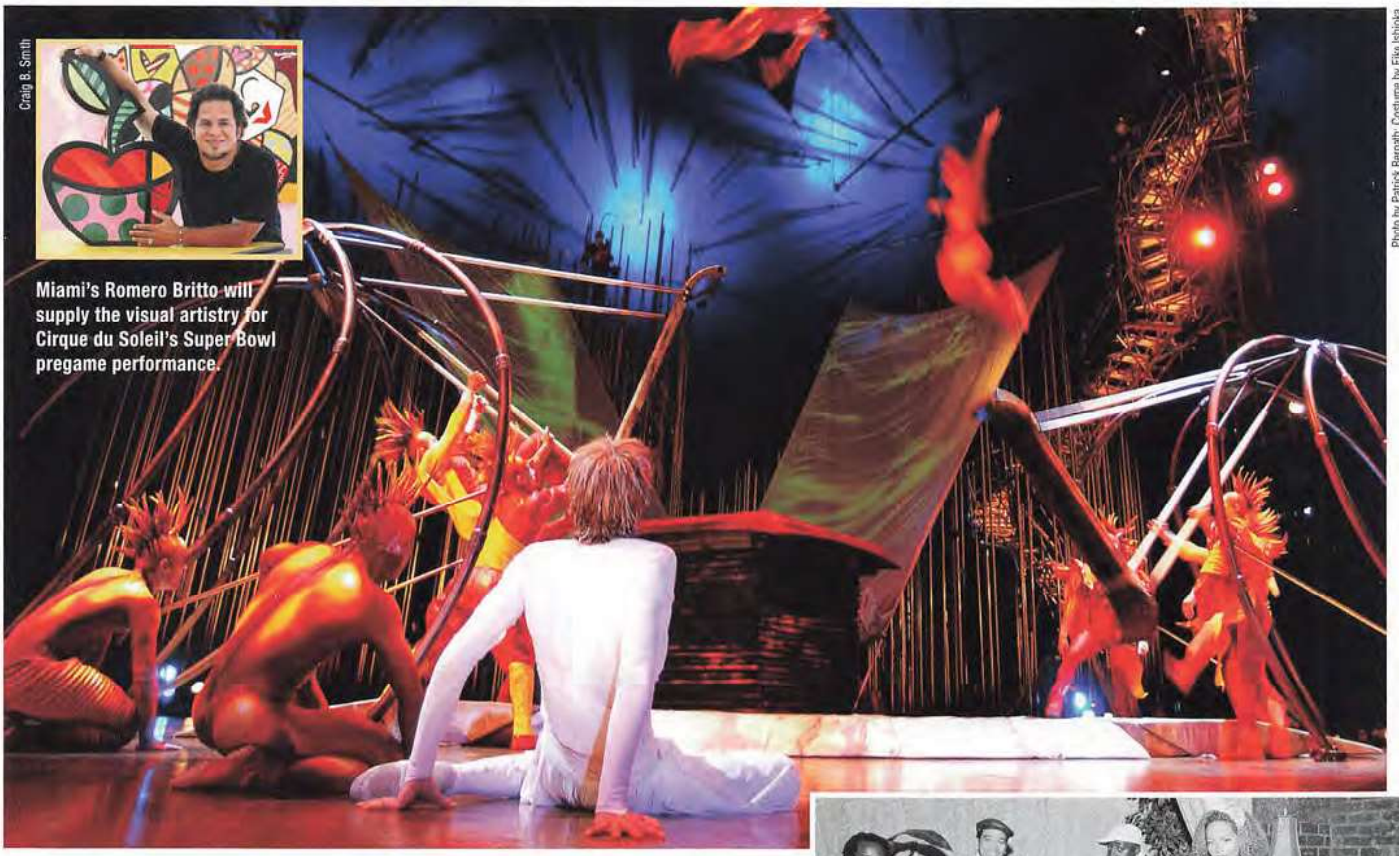
CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



Miami's Romero Britto will supply the visual artistry for Cirque du Soleil's Super Bowl pregame performance.

Louie Vega and Anane with the Elements of Life Orchestra

Fans will be treated to a high-energy extravaganza of music, dance, and more when Cirque du Soleil takes the stage for the *Super Bowl XLI Pregame Show.*

Since its founding in 1984, Cirque du Soleil has become renowned as one of the most unique and enthralling entertainment experiences in the world. So it's fitting that on the world stage of Super Bowl XLI, Cirque will team with Miami-based artist Romero Britto to celebrate South Florida and football in an unprecedented pregame performance.

Adapting a theme seen in Brazilian street theatre, more than 60 professional performers and hundreds of students will invade Dolphin Stadium and embark on an extravaganza of music, dance, gymnastics, and circus arts linked by a splashy, multicolored football theme.

Designed to heighten excitement for the game, the performance will focus on the spirit of competition as two groups of percussionists in stylized team colors perform powerful acrobatic choreography to energize and inspire the players and the audience.

Britto will create a unifying visual signature with palm trees, ocean waves, fish, helmets, footballs, birds, and flowers. Grammy Award winner Louie Vega will supply an original musical score. Vega will perform with his Elements of Life Orchestra—featuring the vocalist Anane—all while Cirque du Soleil's performance comes to life across the stadium field.

For the show, Cirque has assigned Fernand Rainvalle as Director of Creation; Patricia Ruel, Creator of Costumes and Accessories; Geneviève Dorion-Coupal, Choreographer; and Daniel Cola, Acrobatic Coach.

Cirque du Soleil was formed by a troupe of street performers known as "Le Club des Talons Hauts" (the high-heels club). In its first year, 73 people worked for Cirque. Today, the organization has more than 2,500 employees.

And while from 1984 to 1989, Cirque only had one show at a time and played to an average of 270,000 people per year, there are now no fewer than nine productions running on three continents. More than seven million people attended Cirque performances last year.

Don Mischer Productions and White Cherry Entertainment will produce the Super Bowl XLI Pregame Show. David Saltz of Red Eye Flight Productions will also serve as producer of the show. Saltz has previously worked with Cirque on their Beatles-inspired LOVE production and has brought them together with Vega for this pregame performance.

TACKLING THE TOSS AND TROPHY

The NFL will salute two of the most revered figures in South Florida sports history during Super Bowl XLI.

Bryan Bedder/Getty Images

Dan Marino

Prior to the game, Dan Marino will perform the Super Bowl coin toss; after the champion is decided, legendary coach Don Shula will assist in the presentation of the Vince Lombardi Trophy to the winning team by accompanying the trophy onto the stage at midfield.

Elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2005, Marino spent his entire 17-year career with the Dolphins and ranks among the NFL's all-time greatest quarterbacks. He still holds nearly two dozen NFL records, including career passing yards and touchdown passes, and led Miami to Super Bowl XIX.

Marino joins an esteemed list of Super Bowl coin toss participants, including former Presidents Ronald Reagan (from the Oval Office in 1985) and George H.W. Bush; Marie Lombardi, wife of Vince Lombardi; and Pro Football Hall of Famers Earl Campbell, Frank Gifford, Red Grange, George Halas, Don Hutson, Tom Landry, Bronko Nagurski, Alan Page, Art Shell, and Gene Upshaw.

The two-tone commemorative flip coin is silver with 24kt gold highlights and is minted by The Highland Mint Company. The coin features the Super Bowl XLI logo on one side and the Vince Lombardi Trophy and competing team logos on the other.

Shula has coached in the most Super Bowls ever—one with the Baltimore Colts and five with the Dolphins—and won a pair of titles (Super Bowls VII and VIII) while at the helm of the Dolphins. He is the winningest head coach in NFL history with a career mark of 347-173-6 (.665).

Last year's Vince Lombardi Trophy ceremony, which was expanded to include a legend from a prior Super Bowl, featured Hall of Famer Bart Starr, the former Green Bay quarterback who was MVP of Super Bowls I and II.

BILLY JOEL TO SING NATIONAL ANTHEM

Grammy Award-winning performer Billy Joel will sing the National Anthem as part of the *Super Bowl XLI Pregame Show*. Joel becomes the first performer to sing the National Anthem twice at the Super Bowl, having handled the honors in 1989 prior to Super Bowl XXIII in South Florida.

The winner of six Grammys and nominated for 23 in total, Joel is one of the world's most popular recording artists. He has sold more than 100 million records and has 33 Top 40 hits. Joel received the Grammy Legend Award in 1990 and has been inducted into both the Songwriters Hall of Fame (1992) and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1999).

Robert E. Klein/AP WWP

He first hit the charts in 1974 with the single "Piano Man." While he continues to amaze audiences with his pop songs, Joel has also hit No. 1 on the classical album charts for his *Fantasies & Delusions—Music for Solo Piano*, released in October 2001.

Movin' Out, the 2003 dance musical based on 30 of Joel's classic songs, earned him the Tony Award for Best Orchestrations. Last year, he released *12 Gardens Live*, a double-CD recorded at Madison Square Garden during his record-breaking 12 sold-out shows there.

A longtime advocate for music education, Joel recently launched an initiative to provide money, scholarships, and endowments to music schools and colleges through the Billy Joel Endowment Fund.

ThisIsTheBeginning.com

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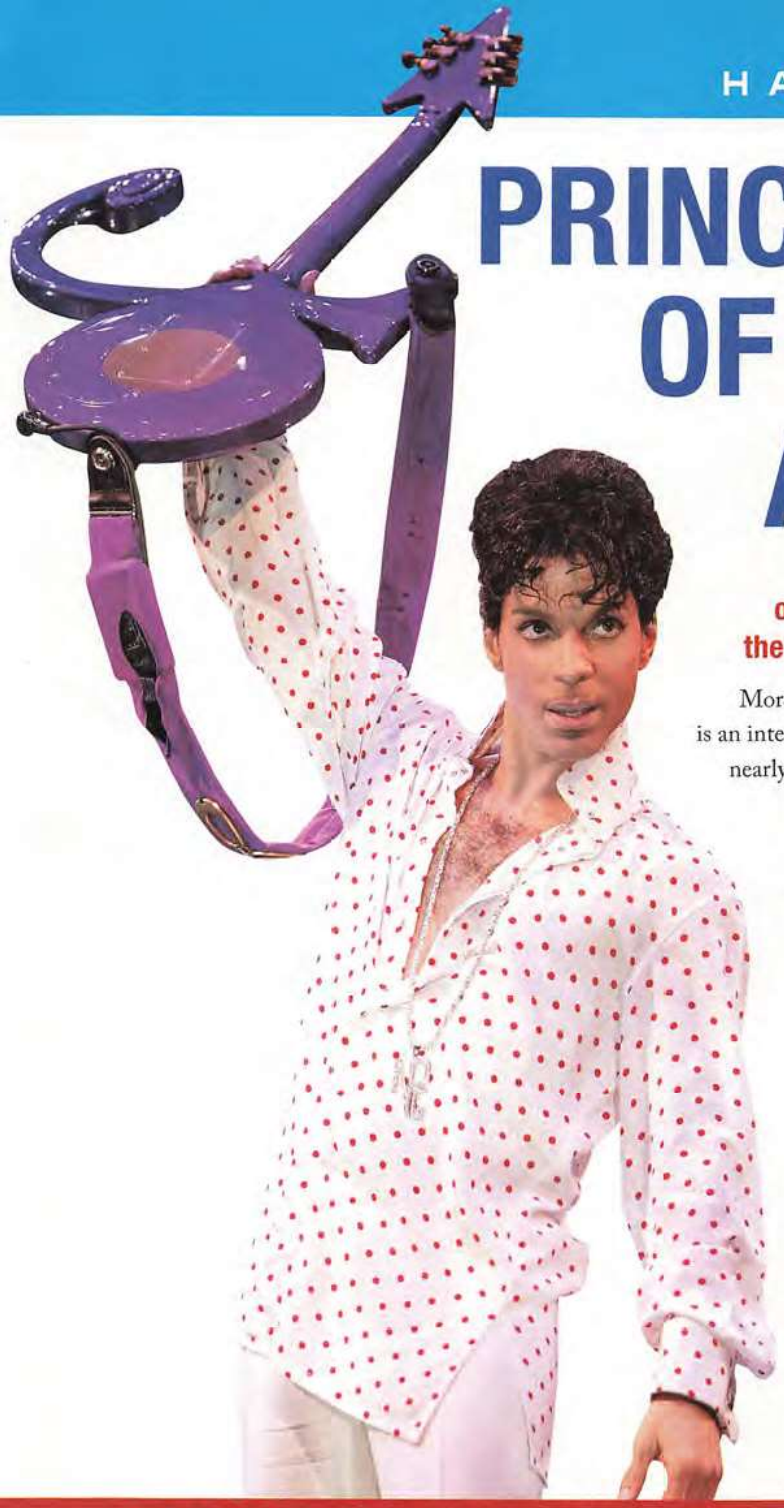

PRINCE TO BE KING OF SUPER BOWL AT HALFTIME!

Amazing music and theatrics will collide when Prince, one of the world's most electrifying performers, headlines the *Pepsi Super Bowl XLI Halftime Show* at Dolphin Stadium.

More than just one of the world's most popular and influential musicians, Prince is an international icon. He's among the greatest performers of our time, having sold nearly 100 million albums, and is a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Prince has won six Grammy Awards and five American Music Awards, and this year has received five Grammy nominations. He won an Oscar for Best Soundtrack for his album that accompanied the 1984 movie *Purple Rain*. Prince also starred in the movie, which was loosely based on his life. In January, Prince earned a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song for "The Song of the Heart," which was featured in the movie *Happy Feet*.

From his first hit, 1979's "I Want To Be Your Lover," to recent smash releases *Musicology* and *3121*, the Minneapolis native has built an amazingly recognizable and successful body of work that appeals to fans of all musical genres. His catalogue consists of nearly three dozen singles that have reached Billboard's Top 40 and includes 20 Top 10 hits, among them "Purple Rain," "Little Red Corvette," "1999," "Kiss," "Delirious," "When Doves Cry," "Let's Go Crazy," "Cream," and "Diamonds and Pearls."

Prince has released 18 certified gold or platinum albums, among them *Purple Rain*, *Around The World In A Day*, *1999*, and *Sign 'O' The Times*. *Musicology* featured the song "Call My Name" and earned him a 2005 Grammy Award for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance.

At his 2004 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Prince's impact on the music world was compared to that of Little Richard, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, and George Clinton, and his induction bio reads, "He rewrote the rulebook, forging a synthesis of black funk and white rock that served as a blueprint for cutting-edge music. Prince made dance music that rocked and rock music that had a bristling, funky backbone."

The Pepsi Super Bowl XLI Halftime Show is being produced by Mischer Productions and White Cherry Entertainment. They have worked with the NFL the past three years on the Opening Kickoff and Super Bowl shows.

PREGAME AND HALFTIME PRODUCTION TEAM

The Pregame and Halftime shows are NFL Network productions.

Executive Producers
Don Mischer
Ricky Kirshner
Glenn Weiss

Halftime Directed by
Don Mischer

Line Producer
Rob Paine

Production Designer
Bruce Rodgers

Lighting Designers
Bob Dickinson
Bob Barnhart

Coordinating Producer
Juliane Hare

Pre-Game Associate Producer
Lisa Geers

Talent Executive
David Paley

Senior Production Manager
Arianne Shean Wert

Pre-Game Production Manager
Tatiana Fuster

Lighting Director
Dave Grill

Art Directors
Mai Sakai
Sean Dougall

Field Cast Choreographer
Kristen Patterson Terry

Staging Supervisors
Tony Hauser
Cap Spence

Wardrobe Supervisor
Garland Riddle

Light-Up Band Uniforms
Marcy Rosenthal
Marc Rosenthal

Technical Manager
Bob Muller

Associate Directors
Gregg Gelfand
Jennifer Mischer

Stage Managers
Gary Natoli
Jeffry Gitter
Harve Levine
Arthur Lewis
Vince Poxon
Karen Tasch Weiss

Production Supervisor
Augie Max Vargas
Brad Duns

Production Coordinators
Cara Imperato
Sarah King
Jesse Leed
Amanda McDonough
Stefani Ramirez
Jim Stechschulte

Assistants to the Executive Producers
Sarah Levine
Jason Uhrmacher

Volunteer & Cast Procurement
Shawn Kelly
Bryan Ransom
Holly Silber

Production Accountant
Alan Reback

Production Legal
Kerry Smith

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all mirrored by a design narrow enough to reflect any hand that holds it. Hellomoto. ***motorola.com***

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INDIANAPOLIS

STATISTICAL LEADERS

PASSING	Comp-Att	Pct	Yds	TD	Int	Rtng
Peyton Manning	362-557	65.0	4397	31	9	101.0

RUSHING	Att	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Joseph Addai	226	1081	4.8	41	7
Dominic Rhodes	187	641	3.4	17	5
Peyton Manning	23	36	1.6	12	4

RECEIVING	No	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Marvin Harrison	95	1366	14.4	68	12
Reggie Wayne	86	1310	15.2	51	9
Joseph Addai	40	325	8.1	21	1
Ben Utecht	37	377	10.2	26	0
Dominic Rhodes	36	251	7.0	27	0
Dallas Clark	30	367	12.2	40	4
Bryan Fletcher	18	202	11.2	26	2
Brandon Stokley	8	85	10.6	23	1
Aaron Moorehead	8	82	10.3	36	1

TACKLES	Tackles	Assists	Total	Sacks	FR
Cato June	85	77	162	1.0	1
Gary Brackett	72	51	123	0.0	0
Antoine Bethea	64	41	105	0.0	0
Robert Mathis	76	14	90	9.5	2
Marlin Jackson	49	27	76	0.0	0
Raheem Brock	59	15	74	3.0	3
Nick Harper	59	14	73	0.0	0
Gilbert Gardner	33	33	66	0.0	0
Jason David	38	15	53	0.0	1
Rob Morris	30	18	48	0.0	0
Anthony McFarland	40	5	45	2.5	1
Dwight Freeney	35	10	45	5.5	0
Josh Thomas	29	6	35	1.0	1
Kelvin Hayden	22	9	31	0.0	1

INTERCEPTIONS	No	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Nick Harper	3	18	6.0	19	0
Cato June	3	14	4.7	8	0
Mike Doss	2	47	23.5	31	0
Jason David	2	16	8.0	16	0

KICK RETURNS	Ret	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Terrence Wilkins	52	1272	24.5	70	0

PUNT RETURNS	Ret	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Terrence Wilkins	21	193	9.2	82	1

PUNTING	No	Avg	Net	In/20	Long
Hunter Smith	47	44.4	34.5	14	61

FIELD GOALS	Total	1-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Adam Vinatieri	25/28	1/1	3/3	12/13	9/10	0/1

STARTERS—OFFENSE

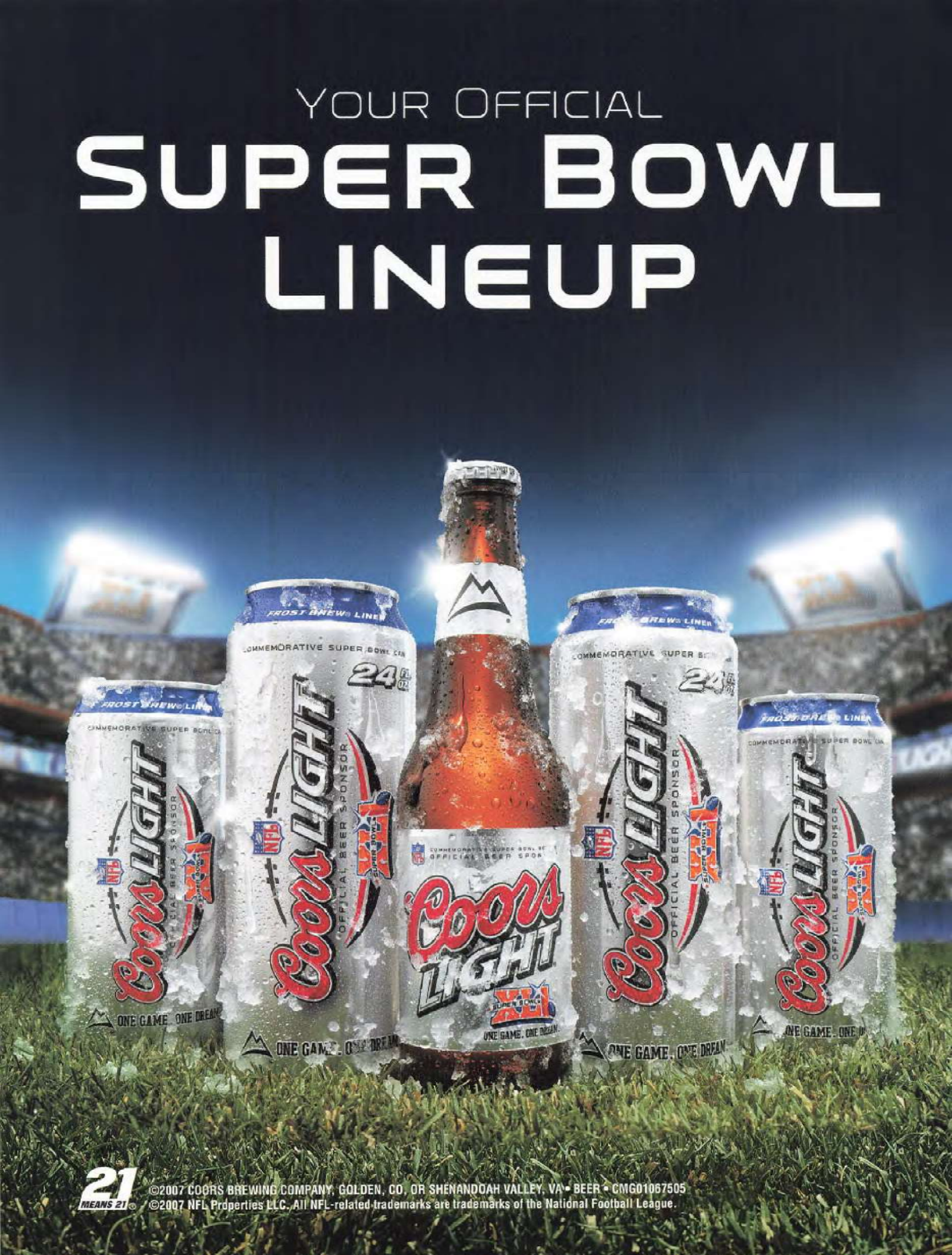
No	Player	Pos
87	Reggie Wayne	WR
78	Tarik Glenn	LT
65	Ryan Lilja	LG
63	Jeff Saturday	C
73	Jake Scott	RG
71	Ryan Diem	RT
44	Dallas Clark	TE
88	Marvin Harrison	WR
18	Peyton Manning	QB
29	Joseph Addai	RB
86	Ben Utecht	H-B

STARTERS—DEFENSE

No	Player	Pos
98	Robert Mathis	LE
92	Anthony McFarland	LT
79	Raheem Brock	RT
93	Dwight Freeney	RE
94	Rob Morris	SLB
58	Gary Brackett	MLB
59	Cato June	WLB
25	Nick Harper	LCB
42	Jason David	RCB
41	Antoine Bethea	SS
21	Bob Sanders	FS

NUMERICAL ROSTER

No	Player	Pos
4	Adam Vinatieri	K
10	Terrence Wilkins	WR
11	Ricky Proehl	WR
12	Jim Sorgi	QB
17	Hunter Smith	P
18	Peyton Manning	QB
21	Bob Sanders	DB
25	Nick Harper	DB
26	Kelvin Hayden	DB
27	Tim Jennings	DB
28	Marlin Jackson	DB
29	Joseph Addai	RB
30	DeDe Dorsey	RB
33	Dominic Rhodes	RB
34	T.J. Rushing	DB
36	Dexter Reid	DB
41	Antoine Bethea	DB
42	Jason David	DB
43	Matt Giordano	DB
44	Dallas Clark	TE
48	Justin Snow	TE
50	Rocky Boiman	LB
51	Gilbert Gardner	LB
53	Keith O'Neil	LB
54	Freddy Keiaho	LB
56	Tyjuan Hagler	LB
57	Dylan Gandy	C/G
58	Gary Brackett	LB
59	Cato June	LB
61	Dan Klecko	DT
63	Jeff Saturday	C
64	Bo Schobel	DE
65	Ryan Lilja	G
69	Matt Ulrich	G
71	Ryan Diem	T
73	Jake Scott	G
74	Charlie Johnson	T
76	Dan Federkeil	T
78	Tarik Glenn	T
79	Raheem Brock	DT
81	Bryan Fletcher	TE
84	John Standeford	WR
85	Aaron Moorehead	WR
86	Ben Utecht	TE
87	Reggie Wayne	WR
88	Marvin Harrison	WR
91	Josh Thomas	DE
92	Anthony McFarland	DT
93	Dwight Freeney	DE
94	Rob Morris	LB
95	Darrell Reid	DT
98	Robert Mathis	DE
99	Ryan LaCasse	DE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CHICAGO

STATISTICAL LEADERS

PASSING	Comp-Att	Pct	Yds	TD	Int	Rtng
Rex Grossman	262-480	54.6	3193	23	20	73.9
Brian Griese	18-32	56.3	220	1	2	62.0

RUSHING	Att	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Thomas Jones	296	1210	4.1	30	6
Cedric Benson	157	647	4.1	30	6
Adrian Peterson	10	41	4.1	11	2

RECEIVING	No	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Muhsin Muhammad	60	863	14.4	40	5
Bernard Berrian	51	775	15.2	62	6
Desmond Clark	45	626	13.9	33	6
Thomas Jones	36	154	4.3	21	0
Jason McKie	25	162	6.5	26	0
Rashied Davis	22	303	13.8	31	2
Mark Bradley	14	282	20.1	75	3

TACKLES	Tackles	Assists	Total	Sacks	FR
Brian Urlacher	92	49	141	0.0	1
Lance Briggs	109	21	130	1.0	1
Charles Tillman	68	12	80	0.0	1
Danieal Manning	51	16	67	0.0	1
Chris Harris	44	10	54	0.0	0
Ricky Manning Jr.	42	11	53	2.0	2
Hunter Hillenmeyer	36	12	48	0.0	1
Alex Brown	40	6	46	7.0	2
Nathan Vasher	33	12	45	0.0	0
Adewale Ogunleye	28	15	43	6.5	3
Todd Johnson	25	7	32	0.0	0
Tommie Harris	22	6	28	5.0	1
Mark Anderson	23	5	28	12.0	1
Alfonso Boone	22	4	26	2.0	0

INTERCEPTIONS	No	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Ricky Manning Jr.	5	113	22.6	54	1
Charles Tillman	5	32	6.4	13	0
Brian Urlacher	3	38	12.7	36	0
Nathan Vasher	3	11	3.7	7	0

KICK RETURNS	Ret	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Devin Hester	20	528	26.4	96	2
Rashied Davis	32	753	23.5	42	0

PUNT RETURNS	Ret	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Devin Hester	47	600	12.8	84	3

PUNTING	No	Avg	Net	In/20	Long
Brad Maynard	77	44.2	37.6	24	65

FIELD GOALS	Total	1-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+
Robbie Gould	32/36	0/0	6/6	14/16	12/14	0/0

STARTERS—OFFENSE

No	Player	Pos
87	Muhsin Muhammad	WR
76	John Tait	LT
74	Ruben Brown	LG
57	Olin Kreutz	C
63	Roberto Garza	RG
69	Fred Miller	RT
88	Desmond Clark	TE
80	Bernard Berrian	WR
8	Rex Grossman	QB
20	Thomas Jones	RB
37	Jason McKie	FB

STARTERS—DEFENSE

No	Player	Pos
93	Adewale Ogunleye	LE
70	Alfonso Boone	DT
99	Tank Johnson	NT
96	Alex Brown	RE
55	Lance Briggs	WLB
54	Brian Urlacher	MLB
92	Hunter Hillenmeyer	SLB
33	Charles Tillman	LCB
31	Nathan Vasher	RCB
35	Todd Johnson	SS
38	Danieal Manning	FS

NUMERICAL ROSTER

No	Player	Pos
4	Brad Maynard	P
8	Rex Grossman	QB
9	Robbie Gould	K
12	Justin Gage	WR
14	Brian Griese	QB
16	Mark Bradley	WR
18	Kyle Orton	QB
20	Thomas Jones	RB
21	Dante Wesley	CB
22	Tyler Everett	S
23	Devin Hester	CB
24	Ricky Manning Jr.	CB
27	Nick Turnbull	S
29	Adrian Peterson	RB
31	Nathan Vasher	CB
32	Cedric Benson	RB
33	Charles Tillman	CB
35	Todd Johnson	S
37	Jason McKie	FB
38	Danieal Manning	S
44	Cameron Worrell	S
46	Chris Harris	S
48	J.D. Runnels	FB
53	Leon Joe	LB
54	Brian Urlacher	LB
55	Lance Briggs	LB
57	Olin Kreutz	C
58	Darrell McClover	LB
59	Rod Wilson	LB
60	Terrence Metcalf	G
63	Roberto Garza	G/C
65	Patrick Mannelly	LS
68	Anthony Oakley	C/G
69	Fred Miller	T
70	Alfonso Boone	DT
71	Israel Idonije	DL
74	Ruben Brown	G
76	John Tait	T
78	John St. Clair	T
80	Bernard Berrian	WR
81	Rashied Davis	WR
82	Gabe Reid	TE
85	John Gilmore	TE
87	Muhsin Muhammad	WR
88	Desmond Clark	TE
90	Antonio Garay	DT
92	Hunter Hillenmeyer	LB
93	Adewale Ogunleye	DE
94	Brendon Ayanbadejo	LB
95	Ian Scott	DT
96	Alex Brown	DE
97	Mark Anderson	DE
99	Tank Johnson	DT

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS AFC CHAMPION

TOO SOFT. TOO SLICK. CAN'T STOP THE RUN. CAN'T POUND THE BALL. THOSE WORDS WERE USED TO DESCRIBE THE COLTS AFTER THEIR ROARING 9-0 START DESCENDED INTO A 3-4 FINISH. BUT FROM THE MOMENT THEY TOOK THE FIELD FOR THEIR WILD CARD GAME AGAINST THE CHIEFS, THIS TEAM TOOK ON AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT PERSONALITY.

Courtesy of Indianapolis Colts

They relied more on toughness, fire, and grit than finesse. Stop the run? They stuffed it—with a vengeance. And when it came time to win the battle of the trenches, an offense that always seemed better suited for a track meet pounded with authority. Above it all, they were mentally tough.

Try wrapping your mind around this: Peyton Manning threw only one touchdown pass and was intercepted five times in Indianapolis' first two playoff victories. Or this: Adam Vinatieri's five field goals accounted for all of the team's scoring in a 15-6 divisional-round win over the Ravens.

But the Colts aren't interested in style points any more. Their only concern is finally having the opportunity that has eluded Manning since his arrival in Indianapolis nine years ago and eluded the franchise dating back to the 1970 season: a Super Bowl appearance.

Until now, Manning carried the burden of a player who could put up spectacular numbers...and had nothing to show for them. He set records, won MVP awards, was selected to multiple Pro Bowls, and already had a spot reserved in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. But each and every playoff run had ended in the bitter disappointment of unfulfilled promise.

This year was different. The Colts won close games, they won when their offense struggled, and they pulled together just when it seemed like things were falling apart. After clipping Kansas City and going on the road to beat Baltimore, they exorcised the demon that had been the Patriots with an exhilarating 38-34 triumph in the AFC title game. Suddenly, the team that had swung and missed so many times—and was now staring down the very real possibility that its best chances had already slipped away—stands on the brink of a Super Bowl crown.

"Any professional football player ought to play with a sense of urgency," Manning says. "I've always kind of played for the moment. You have an opportunity in front of you, you want to take advantage of it."

As has been their forté for years, the Colts can explode for big plays and score plenty of points. The good news now is that their defense, last in the league against the run, has elevated its level of play dramatically. A week after holding the Chiefs' Larry Johnson, the NFL's No. 2 rusher, to 32 yards, it limited Baltimore's talented Jamal Lewis to 53. New England's one-two punch of Corey Dillon and Laurence Maroney managed only 61 yards.

"That's the way we had hoped to play all year," says Dungy, who joins the Bears' Lovie Smith as the first African-American head coaches to reach the Super Bowl. "We picked a good time to play that way."

2006 RESULTS (15-4)

Opponent	Score	W/L
@ N.Y. Giants	26-21	W
Houston	43-24	W
Jacksonville	21-14	W
@ N.Y. Jets	31-28	W
Tennessee	14-13	W
Washington	36-22	W
@ Denver	34-31	W
@ New England	27-20	W
Buffalo	17-16	W
@ Dallas	14-21	L
Philadelphia	45-21	W
@ Tennessee	17-20	L
@ Jacksonville	17-44	L
Cincinnati	34-16	W
@ Houston	24-27	L
Miami	27-22	W
Playoffs		
Kansas City	23-8	W
@ Baltimore	15-6	W
New England	38-34	W

AFC Championship Game: @ Indianapolis 38, New England 34

After staging the biggest rally in conference title-game history, the Colts are heading to Super Bowl XLI. Indianapolis found itself in a 21-3 hole against the visiting Patriots, before gaining momentum just before halftime with a 26-yard Adam Vinatieri field goal. By midway through the third quarter—after Peyton Manning scored on a 1-yard run and then threw a short TD pass to Dan Klecko—the game was tied. The teams then traded points, with New England seizing the lead on three separate occasions only to see the Colts answer right back. Shortly after New England moved ahead, 34-31, on Stephen Gostkowski's 43-yard field goal with 3:49 to play, Manning (27-of-47, 349 yards) led a game-winning 80-yard drive. He fired two completions to Reggie Wayne and had a 32-yard connection with Bryan Fletcher, setting up Joseph Addai for a 3-yard burst up the middle that gave the Colts their first lead of the game with one minute remaining. The Patriots then managed to move into Indianapolis territory, but Marlin Jackson picked off a Tom Brady pass to seal the victory.

Chris McGrath/Getty Images

Dwight Freeney (left) and Peyton Manning (above) have brought the Colts within one game of the franchise's second Super Bowl title. Freeney, a five-year veteran, is among the NFL's dominant pass-rushers and has 56.5 career sacks. Manning was on target again in 2006, throwing 31 touchdowns with just nine interceptions.

OFFENSE

Let's hope anyone worrying after Manning's playoff struggles against the Chiefs and Ravens saw the second half of the AFC title game. As he masterfully showed, he can still carry the Colts to victory. He's also one of the best game-managing quarterbacks the NFL has ever seen, constantly adjusting to what the defense shows and usually making the right reads and decisions about where to go with the ball.

Manning has shown far greater patience this season as defenses play less single coverage and use zone looks that force him to pick up yards in small bites rather than large gulps. When an opponent blitzes, he will simply throw to the vacated area beneath the coverage. Manning generally doesn't force throws—this year he had 31 touchdown passes and was picked off just nine times—and he has the patience to hang in the pocket as long as possible to get the ball to game-breaking receivers Reggie Wayne and Marvin Harrison.

Harrison (95 receptions, 12 TDs) continues to be one of the best wideouts in the league, showing tremendous quickness off the snap and the ability to avoid defenders after the catch. He has superb hands and excellent body control. Harrison also sets the standard for all NFL receivers for his route running and knack for setting up defenders with a variety of moves.

The Colts like to use three- and four-receiver sets that put Harrison and Wayne (86 receptions) on the outside, while alternating tight ends Dallas Clark and Ben Utecht and wideout Aaron Moorehead at the inside slots. With most teams devoting extra attention to Wayne and Harrison, Clark—who returned in Week 17 after missing four games with a knee injury—usually has little trouble getting open against a linebacker across the middle. Four of his 30 catches during the regular season went for TDs. He then led the Colts with six receptions in their title game win over the Patriots.

Another sign of Manning's patience is that when he sees that an opponent isn't crowding the line of scrimmage with an extra defender, he won't hesitate to check to a run and let rookie Joseph Addai or Dominic Rhodes take advantage of the large patches of green in front of them. Addai, who rushed for 122 yards against the Chiefs, is a big-play threat with blazing speed and lower-body power. He also is an effective receiver, finishing the year with 40 catches. On the team's patented stretch play, Addai has done an effective job by quickly reaching the corner, showing decisiveness with his cuts and exploding upfield for nice gains.

Rhodes is a solid, between-the-tackles runner who can pick up the tough yards when the Colts are trying to kill time late in the game. The two backs combined for more than 1,700 yards and 12 touchdowns during the regular season. Against New England, they teamed up for 125 yards and a touchdown.

How important is a productive ground game to the Colts' success? Extremely. Indy went 5-0 during the regular season when they rushed for at least 125 yards. In Manning's nine years there, the Colts are just 12-25 when he attempts 40 or more passes, yet have gone 76-18 when their running backs combine for 25 or more carries.

Courtesy of Indianapolis Colts

Six-year veteran Reggie Wayne earned his first Pro Bowl selection after making a career-high 86 receptions, nine that went for touchdowns. He had five catches in the AFC title game.

Tackles Tarik Glenn and Ryan Diem, guards Ryan Lilja and Jake Scott, and center Jeff Saturday form one of the best offensive lines in the NFL. Glenn is an outstanding pass protector whose 6-5, 332-pound frame and considerable strength allow him to engulf most defensive ends and wear them down during a game. Lilja, after missing the first half of the season with a knee injury, has helped stabilize the unit. The Colts' 15 sacks allowed were the fewest in the league this season.

DEFENSE

Opponents routinely dominated the Colts' run defense during the year—Indianapolis allowed at least 100 rushing yards in every regular-season game and an average of 173 yards per game. Another disturbing statistic was that the team ranked last in the NFL in stopping third-down conversions, allowing opponents to convert 47 percent of their attempts.

Improvement has come with the smallish tackle duo of Raheem Brock and Anthony McFarland performing better in the postseason, using their quickness and penetration to make contact in the backfield. At 6-0 and 300 pounds, McFarland is the team's largest defensive lineman. He and Brock may lack the girth to hold up at the point of attack, but are doing their best to pick up the slack for Montae Reagor, who has been out since suffering serious cuts to his face and head in an October car accident.

Although Dwight Freeney had a career-low 5.5 sacks this season, he still is the most explosive end in the game. He has the best first step in the league and forces opponents to account for him on every down. The Colts like to use zone blitzes to allow Freeney and fellow end Robert Mathis (9.5 sacks) more freedom to get to the quarterback.

To be effective on running plays, middle linebacker Gary Brackett and outside linebackers Cato June (team-leading 162 tackles, three interceptions) and Rob Morris must blitz in hopes of forcing the running back to make cuts before he gets to the line. The Colts also will drop free safety Bob Sanders and strong safety Antoine Bethea into the tackle box to stop the run, though that makes them vulnerable against high-percentage passes to the middle of the field.

Indianapolis asks cornerback Jason David to lock down on the opponent's best receiver and follow him all over the field. The Colts will use safety help deep, and linebackers can follow the receiver on short and intermediate routes with David helping over the top.

SPECIAL TEAMS

In Adam Vinatieri, the Colts possess the best clutch placekicker in the game. Vinatieri twice won Super Bowls for New England with field goals in the final seconds. Indy counts on him to produce points and deliver under pressure, and Vinatieri gives the offense the comfort of knowing it doesn't always need to put the ball in the end zone to score. He made 25-of-28 attempts this season.

Punter Hunter Smith ranked third in the AFC with a 44.4-yard average, placing 14 kicks inside the 20-yard line with five touchbacks.

Terrence Wilkins averaged a career-high 24.5-yards on kickoff returns. He also returned a punt for a touchdown.

WHAT TO EXPECT

It might be a bit of a stretch to say the Colts have reinvented themselves, but they certainly have been a different team in the playoffs than the one we saw slump late in the regular season. Attitude and effort have improved their struggling run defense. They are swarming to the ball and getting good penetration to disrupt running plays before they start.

As long as that exceptional defensive play continues, Indianapolis is capable of coming out on top, even in a low-scoring struggle—something not necessarily true in previous years. In this type of match-up, Vinatieri may prove to be the decisive edge the Colts need.

Still, Manning and his receivers are extremely dangerous—Harrison, Wayne, and Clark all figure to have their share of chances to make game-breaking catches. And if the Bears focus too much on shutting down the passing game, they could easily find themselves burned, watching from behind as the speedy Addai goes the distance on a carry.

It adds up to the most complete Colts team we've seen in recent years. If they hit full stride, it could mean a Super Bowl title for Indianapolis.

–Vic Carucci, NFL.com National Editor

Medicine time

shouldn't be a full contact sport.

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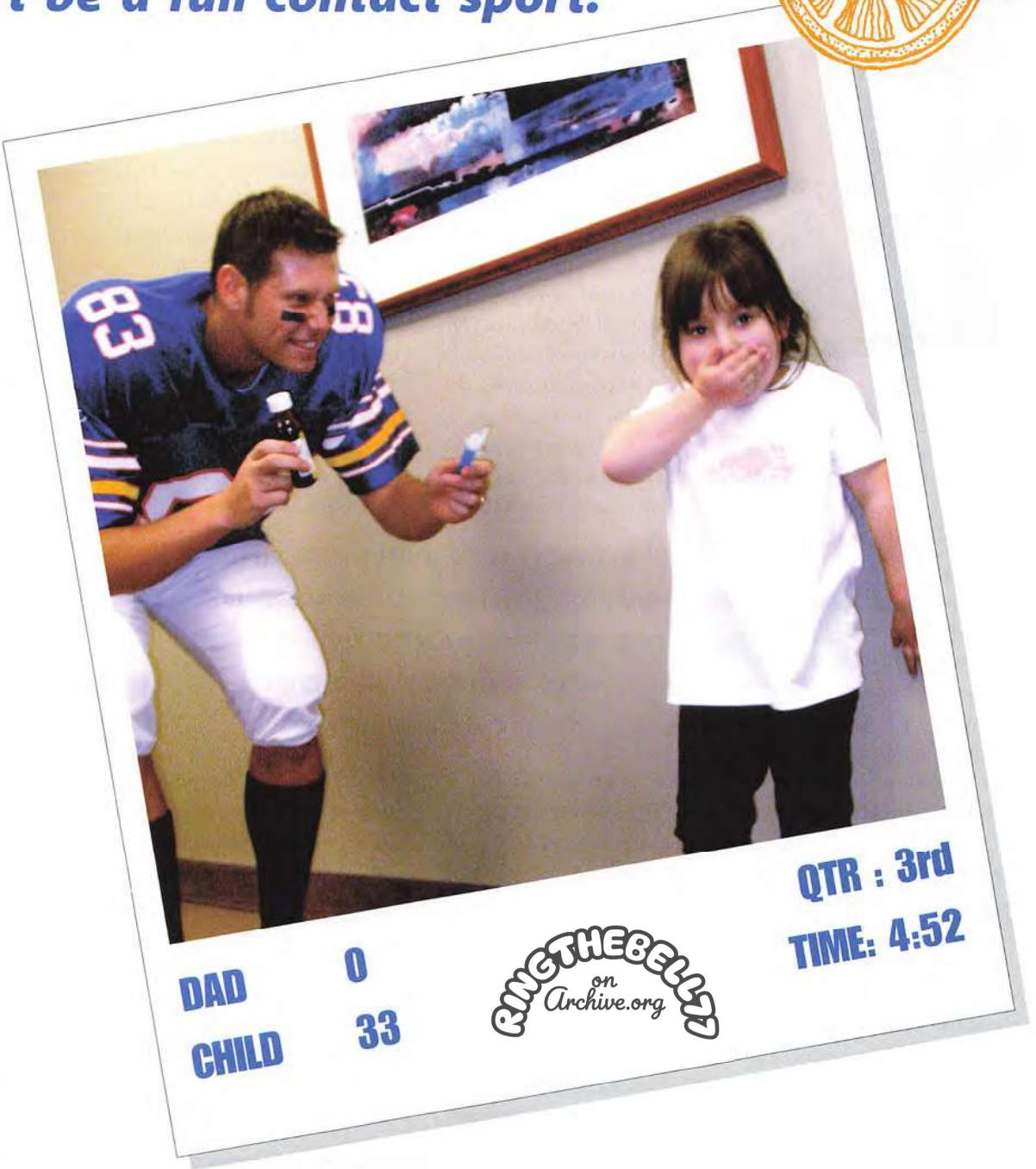

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JIM IRSAY Owner and CEO

Courtesy of Indianapolis Colts

In 1997, when he assumed control of the team his family has owned since 1972, Jim Irsay made a commitment to revitalize the franchise and build a championship caliber team. In just 10 seasons, he has accomplished both goals, to the delight of Colts fans in Indianapolis and around the world.

He started by hiring club President Bill Polian in late 1997 and drafting Peyton Manning in 1998. He has continued to field his team with coaches and players who are committed to excellence and whose work ethics and character are superior. Head Coach Tony Dungy was added in 2002 and has led the team to a regular-season record of 60-20. His tenure has been highlighted by five straight playoff appearances, four consecutive AFC South titles, two AFC Championship Games, and this year's Super Bowl.

The success of the 2006 season was certified when the Colts became the first team in NFL history to open with nine consecutive victories in back-to-back seasons. Moreover, the Colts then became the second team in league history to win 12 or more games four years in a row (2003-06).

Setting a franchise mark with its fourth straight division title, the team also made the playoffs for the fifth consecutive season and the seventh time in eight seasons. Well represented, once again, in the AFC-NFC Pro Bowl, five Colts players have been selected for this year's game.

Despite his youth (47), Irsay is one of the most experienced owners in the NFL. Describing his nearly lifelong connection to the team, he states, "I started as a ball boy and have worked in virtually every non-player, non-coaching position in our organization, so I really learned the game from inside out, working side by side with many people."

He joined the professional staff in 1982, following his graduation with a degree in broadcast journalism from Southern Methodist University. He was named Vice President and General Manager in 1984. He served in that capacity until taking the role of Senior Executive Vice President, General Manager and Chief Operating Officer in April of 1996. An active and participating owner, Irsay serves on the league's Finance Committee and the Super Bowl Policy Committee, and also has served on the Executive Committee of the Management Council and the Pro-College Relations Committee. He also was a member of the Realignment Working Group and the Working Club Executive Committee that authored the NFL's Collective Bargaining Agreement in 1993.

His community leadership in Central Indiana includes board service on the Greater Indianapolis Progress Committee, the Indianapolis Convention and Visitors Association, United Way of Central Indiana, The Indy Partnership, and Noble of Indiana.

Jim and his wife, Meg, oversee the Colts' extensive contributions program. They have been major supporters of The Julian Center, a shelter for victims of domestic abuse that also sponsors programs to eliminate the problem. "I consider myself a really serious businessman, but I think big business can have big heart," says Irsay.

AN ACTIVE & PARTICIPATING OWNER, JIM IRSAY SERVES ON THE NFL'S FINANCE COMMITTEE AND THE SUPER BOWL POLICY COMMITTEE.

As part of their support for Indianapolis' cultural tourism initiative, the Irsays have funded a multi-year sponsorship of Dance Kaleidoscope, Indiana's premier professional contemporary dance company. Other issue-oriented programs they support include the Hoosier Environmental Council and its Wabash Riverkeeper Program, a cancer research program at the Indiana University Cancer Center, and a decade-long program with Noble of Indiana to help the families of children with disabilities.

Although his professional life has been totally focused on football, Irsay is a music aficionado who collects rare guitars (including Jerry Garcia's Tiger and one of George Harrison's guitars), an Americana fan who collects rare historical documents, and a poet who purchased Jack Kerouac's original manuscript of *On the Road* and is currently lending it for exhibition across North America.

Jim and Meg have three daughters: Carlie, who is pursuing graduate work in psychology; Casey, a graduate of Indiana University's Kelley School of Business; and Kalen, a freshman at Indiana University.

COLTS TEAM OFFICIALS

Jim Irsay	Owner & CEO
Bill Polian	President
Tony Dungy	Head Coach
Pete Ward	Senior Executive Vice President
Bob Terpening	Executive Vice President
Tom Zupancic	Senior Vice President, Sales & Marketing
Chris Polian	Vice President, Football Operations
Kurt Humphrey	Vice President, Finance
Larry Hall	Vice President, Ticket Operations/Guest Services
Craig Kelley	Vice President, Public Relations
Jay Souers	Vice President, Sponsorship Sales
Greg Hylton	Vice President, Premium Seating and Ticket Sales
Steve Champlin	Director of Football Administration
Tom Telesco	Director of Player Personnel
Dom Anile	Senior Consultant to Player Personnel
Clyde Powers	Director of Pro Player Personnel
Bill Brooks	Executive Director of Administration
Nicole Duncan	Director of Community Relations/Marketing Comm.
Jon Scott	Equipment Manager
Marty Heckscher	Video Director
Hunter Smith	Head Trainer
Dave Hammer	Associate Head Trainer
Vernon Cheek	Assistant Director of Public Relations
Dave Filar	Purchasing Administrator

TONY DUNGY Head Coach

Courtesy of Indianapolis Colts

Tony Dungy completes his fifth season at the helm by guiding Indianapolis to its first Super Bowl appearance in 36 years and the third in franchise history.

Including this year's AFC title game, his record with the Colts stands at 66-24 (.733). His teams have captured four straight AFC South crowns and won at least 10 games every year. His 2005 Colts squad owned an NFL-best 14-2 mark.

Dungy came to Indianapolis on Jan. 22, 2002, after serving as Tampa Bay's head coach for six seasons. Including his time with the Buccaneers, he has guided his teams to eight straight playoff appearances. Twice prior to this season, he reached conference championship games—with Tampa Bay in 1999 and with the Colts following the 2003 season.

Last season, Dungy became the 35th head coach in NFL history to earn 100 career victories and only the sixth to win 100 or more games in his first 10 years.

Dungy spent the 1992-95 seasons as defensive coordinator for the Vikings. His previous pro coaching experience came at Kansas City, where he was a defensive backs coach for three years, and with the Steelers. Dungy coached in Pittsburgh for seven seasons and in 1984, at the age of 28, became the NFL's youngest defensive coordinator.

Dungy entered the coaching ranks in 1980 at his alma mater, the University of Minnesota, where he had been a quarterback (1973-76). He played in the NFL after making the Steelers as a free agent, had nine interceptions in 30 games there, and was a member of Pittsburgh's Super Bowl XIII title team. He was traded to San Francisco in 1979.

A native of Jackson, Mich., Dungy and his wife, Lauren, are the parents of six children: daughters Tiara and Jade; and sons Eric, Jordan and Justin, and the late James Dungy.

COLTS HEAD COACH: TONY DUNGY

ASSISTANTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
Jim Caldwell	Assistant Head Coach/Quarterbacks
Clyde Christensen	Wide Receivers
Leslie Frazier	Special Assistant to Head Coach/Defensive Backs
Richard Howell	Assistant Strength & Conditioning
Gene Huey	Running Backs
Ron Meeks	Defensive Coordinator
Pete Metzelaars	Offensive Quality Control
Tom Moore	Offensive Coordinator
Howard Mudd	Offensive Line
Mike Murphy	Linebackers
Russ Purnell	Special Teams
Diron Reynolds	Defensive Quality Control
John Teerlinck	Defensive Line
Ricky Thomas	Tight Ends
Jon Torine	Strength & Conditioning
Alan Williams	Defensive Backs

COLTS ALPHABETICAL ROSTER

NO	PLAYER	POS	HT	WT	BIRTH DATE	NFL EXP	COLLEGE
29	Addai, Joseph	RB	5-11	214	5/3/83	R	Louisiana State
41	Bethea, Antoine	DB	5-11	203	7/7/84	R	Howard
50	Boiman, Rocky	LB	6-4	236	1/24/80	5	Notre Dame
58	Brackett, Gary	LB	5-11	235	5/23/80	4	Rutgers
79	Brock, Raheem	DT	6-4	274	6/10/78	5	Temple
44	Clark, Dallas	TE	6-3	252	6/12/79	4	Iowa
42	David, Jason	DB	5-8	180	6/12/82	3	Washington State
71	Diem, Ryan	T	6-6	320	7/1/79	6	Northern Illinois
30	Dorsey, DeDe	RB	5-11	196	8/1/84	R	Lindenwood
76	Federkeil, Dan	T	6-6	290	11/9/83	R	Calgary
81	Fletcher, Bryan	TE	6-5	230	3/23/79	2	UCLA
93	Freeney, Dwight	DE	6-1	268	2/19/80	5	Syracuse
57	Gandy, Dylan	C/G	6-3	302	3/8/82	2	Texas Tech
51	Gardner, Gilbert	LB	6-1	228	5/9/82	3	Purdue
43	Giordano, Matt	DB	5-11	200	10/16/82	2	California
78	Glenn, Tarik	T	6-5	332	5/25/76	10	California
56	Hagler, Tyjuan	LB	6-0	236	12/3/81	1	Cincinnati
25	Harper, Nick	DB	5-10	182	9/10/74	6	Ft. Valley State
88	Harrison, Marvin	WR	6-0	185	8/25/72	11	Syracuse
26	Hayden, Kelvin	DB	6-0	195	7/23/83	2	Illinois
28	Jackson, Marlin	DB	6-0	196	6/30/83	2	Michigan
27	Jennings, Tim	DB	5-8	185	12/24/83	R	Georgia
74	Johnson, Charlie	T	6-4	305	5/2/84	R	Oklahoma State
59	June, Cato	LB	6-0	227	11/18/79	4	Michigan
54	Keiaho, Freddy	LB	5-11	226	12/18/82	R	San Diego State
61	Klecko, Dan	DT	5-11	275	1/12/81	4	Temple
99	LaCasse, Ryan	DE	6-2	257	2/6/83	R	Syracuse
65	Lilja, Ryan	G	6-2	290	10/15/81	3	Kansas State
18	Manning, Peyton	QB	6-5	230	3/24/76	9	Tennessee
98	Mathis, Robert	DE	6-2	245	2/26/81	4	Alabama A&M
92	McFarland, Anthony	DT	6-0	300	12/18/77	8	Louisiana State
85	Moorehead, Aaron	WR	6-3	200	11/5/80	4	Illinois
94	Morris, Rob	LB	6-2	243	1/18/75	7	Brigham Young
53	O'Neil, Keith	LB	6-0	240	8/26/80	4	Northern Arizona
11	Proehl, Ricky	WR	6-0	190	3/7/68	17	Wake Forest
95	Reid, Darrell	DT	6-2	288	6/20/82	2	Minnesota
36	Reid, Dexter	DB	5-11	203	3/18/81	3	North Carolina
33	Rhodes, Dominic	RB	5-9	203	1/17/79	6	Midwestern State
34	Rushing, T.J.	DB	5-9	186	6/8/83	R	Stanford
21	Sanders, Bob	DB	5-8	206	2/24/81	3	Iowa
63	Saturday, Jeff	C	6-2	295	6/18/75	8	North Carolina
64	Schobel, Bo	DE	6-5	264	3/24/81	3	TCU
73	Scott, Jake	G	6-5	295	4/16/81	3	Idaho
17	Smith, Hunter	P	6-2	209	8/9/77	8	Notre Dame
48	Snow, Justin	TE	6-3	240	12/21/76	7	Baylor
12	Sorgi, Jim	QB	6-5	196	12/3/80	3	Wisconsin
84	Standeford, John	WR	6-4	206	4/15/82	1	Purdue
91	Thomas, Josh	DE	6-5	271	6/26/81	3	Syracuse
69	Ulrich, Matt	G	6-2	309	12/30/81	2	Northwestern
86	Utecht, Ben	TE	6-6	251	6/30/81	3	Minnesota
4	Vinatieri, Adam	K	6-0	202	12/28/72	11	South Dakota State
87	Wayne, Reggie	WR	6-0	198	11/17/78	6	Miami (Florida)
10	Wilkins, Terrence	WR	5-10	180	7/29/75	6	Virginia

INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

Joseph Addai (29)
Running Back

Antoine Bethea (41)
Defensive Back

Rocky Boiman (50)
Linebacker

Gary Brackett (58)
Linebacker

Raheem Brock (79)
Defensive Tackle

Dallas Clark (44)
Tight End

Jason David (42)
Defensive Back

Ryan Diem (71)
Tackle

DeDe Dorsey (30)
Running Back

Dan Federkeil (76)
Tackle

Bryan Fletcher (81)
Tight End

Dwight Freeney (93)
Defensive End

Dylan Gandy (57)
Center/Guard

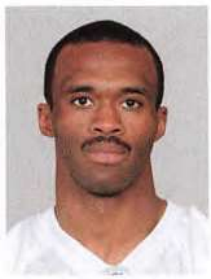
Gilbert Gardner (51)
Linebacker

Matt Giordano (43)
Defensive Back

Tarik Glenn (78)
Tackle

Tyjuan Hagler (56)
Linebacker

Nick Harper (25)
Defensive Back



Marvin Harrison (88)
Wide Receiver

Kelvin Hayden (26)
Defensive Back

Marlin Jackson (28)
Defensive Back

Tim Jennings (27)
Defensive Back

Charlie Johnson (74)
Tackle

Cato June (59)
Linebacker

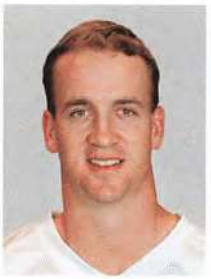
Freddy Keiaho (54)
Linebacker

Dan Klecko (61)
Defensive Tackle

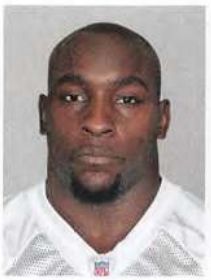
Ryan LaCasse (99)
Defensive End

AFC CHAMPION

Ryan Lilja (65)
Guard



Peyton Manning (18)
Quarterback



Robert Mathis (98)
Defensive End

Anthony McFarland (92)
Defensive Tackle

Aaron Moorehead (85)
Wide Receiver

Rob Morris (94)
Linebacker

Keith O'Neil (53)
Linebacker

Ricky Proehl (11)
Wide Receiver

Darrell Reid (95)
Defensive Tackle

Dexter Reid (36)
Defensive Back

Dominic Rhodes (33)
Running Back

T.J. Rushing (34)
Defensive Back

Bob Sanders (21)
Defensive Back

Jeff Saturday (63)
Center

Bo Schobel (64)
Defensive End

Jake Scott (73)
Guard

Hunter Smith (17)
Punter

Justin Snow (48)
Tight End

Jim Sorgi (12)
Quarterback

John Standeford (84)
Wide Receiver

Josh Thomas (91)
Defensive End

Matt Ulrich (69)
Guard

Ben Utecht (86)
Tight End

Adam Vinatieri (4)
Placekicker

Reggie Wayne (87)
Wide Receiver

Terrence Wilkins (10)
Wide Receiver

CHICAGO BEARS NFC CHAMPION

THE CHICAGO BEARS OWNED THE EARLY PART OF THE 2006 SEASON. THEIR DEFENSE PUNISHED AND DOMINATED. THEIR OFFENSE WAS EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE. AND, AS A BONUS THAT SEEMED ALMOST UNFAIR GIVEN THEIR OTHER STRENGTHS, THEY FEATURED A RETURN MAN CAPABLE OF SCORING ANY TIME HE TOUCHED THE BALL.

Scott Boehm/Getty Images

As the Bears streaked to a 7-0 record—winning five games by at least 26 points—they drew favorable comparisons to Mike Ditka's 1985 squad that shuffled all the way to the Super Bowl XX championship.

But during the season's second half, that shuffle experienced a few stumbles. Although they finished with 13 wins and entered the playoffs as the NFC's top seed, the Bears showed just enough vulnerability to raise questions about whether they could make a run all the way to South Florida.

Quarterback Rex Grossman went from having one of the hottest hands in the league to being plagued by interceptions and fumbles. Injuries mounted on defense and the once dominant unit became increasingly vulnerable. Case in point: Over the final month of the season, the Bears allowed more than 26 points per game.

Yet, to put things into perspective, Chicago did win four of its last five games and coasted to the NFC North crown. And once the playoffs arrived, both Grossman and the defense proved ready for the challenge, slipping by Seattle in overtime in the divisional round and then powering past New Orleans to reach the Super Bowl. The offense was aided by a solid running game, and the defense—while no longer smothering its opponents—showed the ability to make key stops.

What has coach Lovie Smith learned from Grossman's performance in the postseason?

"I've learned that he knows how to bounce back from tough situations," says Smith, who joins the Colts' Tony Dungy as the first African-American head coaches to reach the Super Bowl.

2006 RESULTS (15-3)

Opponent	Score	W/L
@ Green Bay	26-0	W
Detroit	34-7	W
@ Minnesota	19-16	W
Seattle	37-6	W
Buffalo	40-7	W
@ Arizona	24-23	W
San Francisco	41-10	W
Miami	13-31	L
@ N.Y. Giants	38-20	W
@ N.Y. Jets	10-0	W
@ New England	13-17	L
Minnesota	23-13	W
@ St. Louis	42-27	W
Tampa Bay	(OT) 34-31	W
@ Detroit	26-21	W
Green Bay	7-26	L
Playoffs		
Seattle	(OT) 27-24	W
New Orleans	39-14	W

NFC Championship Game — @ Chicago 39, New Orleans 14

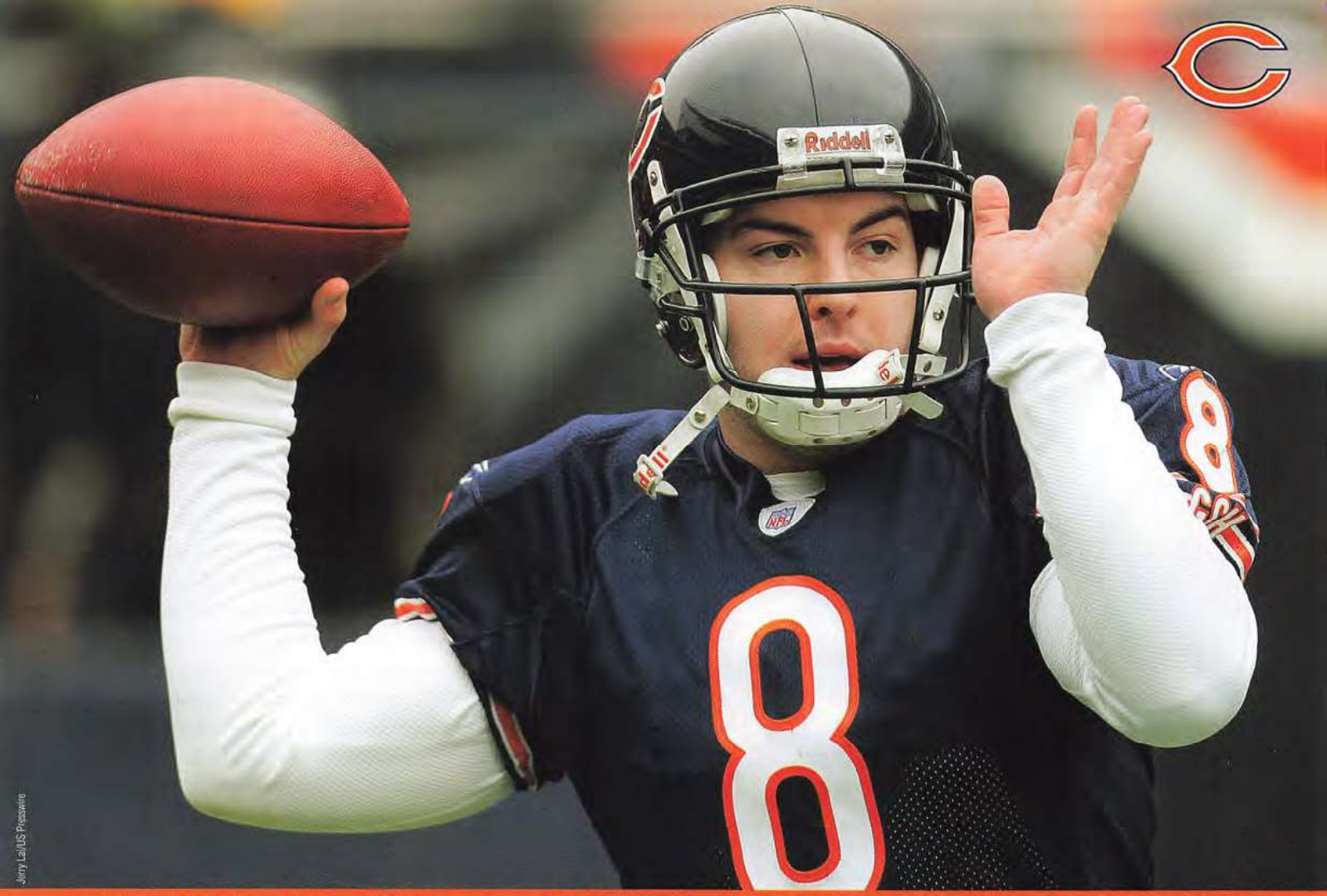
The Bears are on their way to the Super Bowl after pulling away from the Saints by scoring 21 fourth-quarter points. Chicago capitalized on all four turnovers forced by its defense, including two that led to a pair of Robbie Gould field goals and an early 6-0 lead. Another Gould field goal and Thomas Jones' 2-yard TD run extended the advantage to 16-0, but the Saints got on the board just before halftime and Reggie Bush's 88-yard TD reception early in the third quarter pulled New Orleans within two points. It was all Chicago after that. First, the Bears' defense recorded a safety. Then Rex Grossman's 33-yard pass to a lunging Bernard Berrian capped an 85-yard drive and made it 25-14. New Orleans' next two possessions ended in turnovers and Chicago converted both into insurance touchdowns—Cedric Benson's 12-yard scoring run and Jones' second TD of the day, a 15-yard dart for the game's final points. Jones finished with 123 yards rushing and Berrian caught a team-high five passes. Chris Harris made nine tackles and Nathan Vasher grabbed an interception in the victory.

"He's been roasted [since the Green Bay game, a 26-7 loss in Week 17] over all different kinds of things...[But] when you push him up against the wall, he knows how to come out fighting."

Never was that more apparent than against the Seahawks. Grossman didn't dominate the game, but he did throw a touchdown pass and later fired a perfect 30-yard dart to Rashied Davis in overtime that set up Robbie Gould's game-winning field goal.

"No matter what's going on, [Rex] always believes in himself," center Olin Kreutz says. "He's got that kind of talent where he's going to make a play at some point in a game. I don't know how many guys are going to make that throw [in overtime vs. Seattle] at that time with all the pressure that he had on him."

Grossman was similarly effective against the Saints, particularly in the second half after Chicago's lead was sliced to two points. The defense then backed him up, keeping New Orleans—an offensive juggernaut during the regular season—off the board the rest of the game while collecting four turnovers overall.



Jerry Lai/US Presswire

Linebacker Brian Urlacher (left) personifies the Chicago defense, while Rex Grossman (above) is the catalyst for the team's offense. Urlacher is among the fiercest hitters in the game and had 141 tackles and three interceptions this season. Grossman helped the NFC champion Bears to a 7-0 start and finished the year with 23 touchdown passes.

OFFENSE

The Bears are intent on not putting too much of the offensive load on Grossman. With their solid backfield combination of Thomas Jones and Cedric Benson, they usually don't have to.

Jones is an explosive rusher and receiver out of the backfield who is at his best when hitting the outside. The 5-foot-11, 220-pound Benson is an inside runner, although he is capable of bouncing plays beyond the tackles once defenders commit to the interior gaps. He keeps his legs churning and finishes his runs with force.

Jones rushed for 1,210 yards and averaged 4.1 yards per carry; Benson added another 647 yards. Both players scored six rushing TDs. Their dual effectiveness was clearly evident against New Orleans, when they combined for 183 rushing yards and three touchdowns.

Of course, the Bears will look for Grossman to make big throws when necessary. And he's certainly shown to be capable, finishing the year with 23 touchdowns—the most by a Chicago quarterback in 15 years—and nearly 3,200 yards passing. The key is establishing a running game that sets up play-action and allows for throws down the field.

When Grossman struggled at midseason, it was often because he wasn't feeling the pressure as well as he needed to, which made him susceptible to having the ball knocked loose before—or while—making a throw.

Grossman can be extremely effective when delivering quick, high-percentage outlet passes to Jones and tight end Desmond Clark, as well as slants and short crossing routes to wide receivers Muhsin Muhammad and Bernard Berrian underneath coverage. Offensive coordinator Ron Turner prefers to keep Grossman's reads simple so that he can quickly deliver the ball to his speedy receivers.

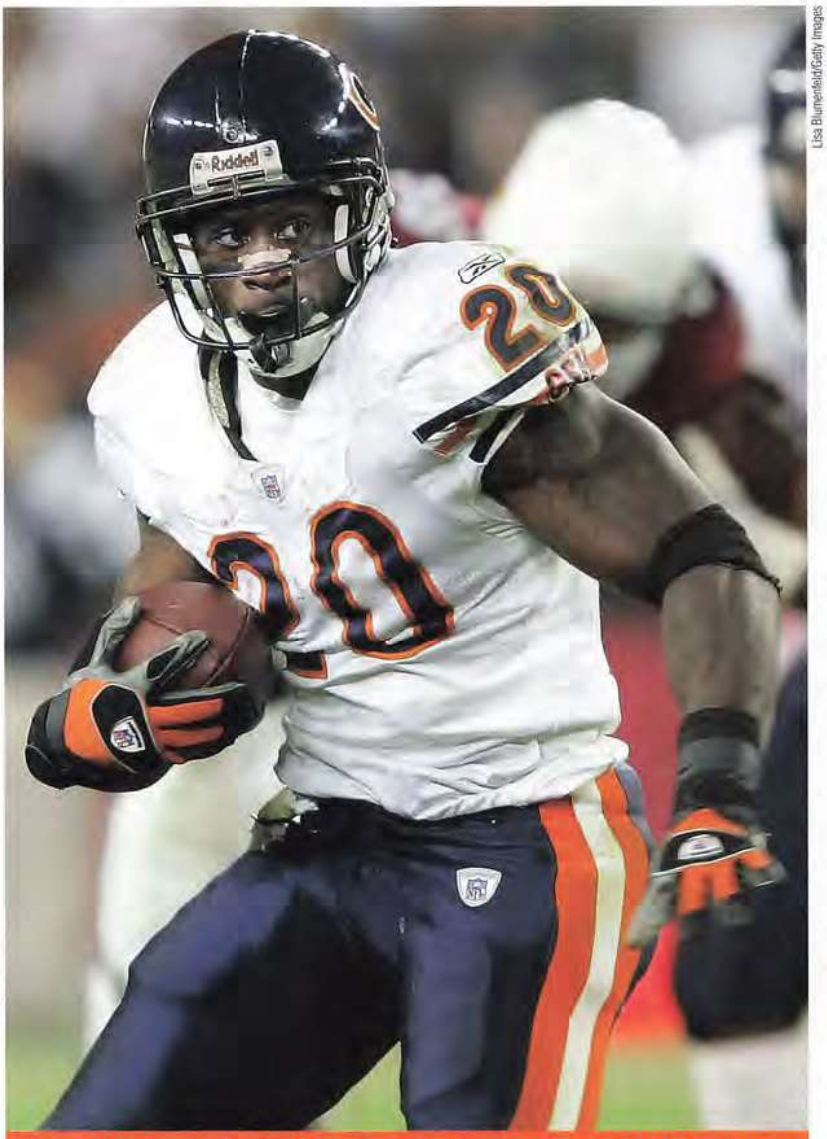
Berrian (51 receptions, six TDs) possesses tremendous speed and gives Chicago its most dangerous deep threat on the perimeter. He shows excellent concentration and ball skills. Muhammad, who had a team-high 60 catches, is a precise route-runner who does a good job of selling fakes and has reliable hands. Davis also has demonstrated that he can be counted on as a game-breaker in critical situations.

Clark has great speed for a tight end and routinely gets behind linebackers and forces safeties to account for him in coverage. He is particularly effective against Cover-Two zone because he can exploit the middle of the field, thereby opening the perimeter for the Bears' wide receivers. Six of Clark's 45 receptions went for touchdowns, tying him with Berrian for the team lead.

Left guard Ruben Brown is the Bears' best pulling guard. When he pulls around to trap block a defensive tackle, it allows Kreutz to reach the second level to block a middle linebacker, giving backs Jones and Benson more room to break into the open field.

Right tackle Fred Miller is a smart, savvy veteran with excellent size (6-7, 314 pounds) who does the little things well, though he can be at a disadvantage against the league's faster and more explosive ends.

The Bears boast a strong pass-blocking line. They yielded just 25 sacks during the season and didn't give up any against the Saints.



Lisa Blumenfeld/Getty Images

Thomas Jones came up big for the Bears in the NFC title game. He rushed for 123 yards and scored twice—on runs of 2 and 15 yards. During the regular season, Jones gained 1,210 yards.

DEFENSE

The Bears have arguably the game's best defensive player in middle linebacker Brian Urlacher. At 6-4 and 258 pounds, he has great size, quickness, explosiveness, and athleticism. Urlacher—who made a team-high 141 tackles—not only has few equals when it comes to attacking the line, but he also moves well laterally and uses his hands skillfully to avoid getting tied up in traffic. He has superb awareness in zone coverage and enough speed to run with backs and tight ends in man coverage.

With Urlacher working between athletic outside linebackers Hunter Hillenmeyer and Lance Briggs, the Bears should be able to frustrate opposing offenses at every turn. However, the unit is without elite defensive tackle Tommie Harris, out since the season's 13th game. Their current tackle duo of Tank Johnson and Ian Scott has been solid, and Johnson's sack of Matt Hasselbeck on third-and-long in Chicago territory effectively ended the Seahawks' hopes for victory late in regulation of the divisional-round game.

Defensive coordinator Ron Rivera will use his tackles to set up inside pressure by Briggs. The idea is to get the tackles to occupy three blockers, thus creating openings for Briggs (130 tackles) to make the stops that would normally come from Harris.

The Bears' best healthy defensive lineman is Alex Brown, who has a wide array of pass-rush moves and works best when coming off the edge. He collected 46 tackles and seven sacks this year. Rookie end Mark Anderson is an effective situational pass-rusher, evidenced by his 12 sacks. The talented Adewale Ogunleye also comes off the edge and finished the regular season with 43 tackles, 6.5 sacks, and three fumble recoveries.

The pass defense took a big hit as a result of injuries (strong safety Mike Brown is on injured reserve), though Chris Harris, Todd Johnson, and rookie Danieal Manning have done their best to handle the safety spots. The return of injured cornerbacks Charles Tillman (back) and Nathan Vasher (hamstring) for the playoffs has helped in coverage.

One problem that surfaced late in the season was when the Bears weren't properly executing the coverage being called. At times, their linebackers passed off receivers to the safeties too early, when Manning and Harris weren't in position to make plays. On other occasions, their linebackers dropped too deep in coverage and left too much room for short passes.

The Bears look to avoid the risk of using man-to-man coverage on their opponent's top receiver. Instead, they usually bracket him with Tillman and a safety over the top. Knowing he has help, Tillman can be extra aggressive in the first five yards, jamming the receiver off the line.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Rookie Devin Hester had an NFL-record six returns for touchdowns this season (on three punts, two kickoffs, and a missed field-goal attempt). Although he might only touch the ball a half-dozen times per game, Hester is one of the Bears' biggest difference-makers. Opponents are wise to punt and kick away from him at all times.

Robbie Gould further cemented his reputation as a clutch kicker when he hit the game-winning 49-yarder in the divisional-round. He made 32-of-36 field goal attempts during the regular season.

WHAT TO EXPECT

As the postseason started, no one really knew what to expect from the Bears. Frankly, the Bears probably didn't know what to expect either. They've shown to be a better team than the one down the stretch, especially at the quarterback position where Grossman has played with the confidence and poise fans saw in the first half of the year.

Yet don't look for Chicago to come out slinging. This is a power-oriented, defensive-minded team. The Bears like to start out on offense by capitalizing on Benson's size and power between the tackles. Once the inside run is established, they'll unleash Jones' speed running. After that, Grossman will get the green light to take shots downfield.

After needing overtime to edge Seattle, the win over the Saints was more in line with what we saw early on in 2006. And that's an exciting prospect for Bears fans. The bottom line is that this well-coached team won't take foolish chances in the Super Bowl—Chicago will strive to be sound, balanced, and patient, and seize upon its opponent's miscues.

–Vic Carucci, NFL.com National Editor

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VIRGINIA McCASKEY Owner

Courtesy of Chicago Bears

Virginia McCaskey, daughter of Chicago Bears founder and NFL pioneer George Halas, has the official title of Secretary of the Board of Directors of the Chicago Bears. She succeeds her father, her brother Mugs, and her husband, Ed.

While leaving the day-to-day operations of the team to others, McCaskey's influence on the organization is undeniable and she attends quarterly Board meetings. McCaskey also attends every Chicago Bears game—home and away—and oversees the hierarchy of the franchise with her presence at league meetings and functions. Former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue has affectionately referred to her as "The First Lady of the NFL."

She has presented the George S. Halas trophy—which is awarded to the NFC champion—on several occasions, including to the Bears, New York Giants, and Green Bay Packers. Of the nine world championships the Bears have won, McCaskey has witnessed eight of those seasons.

McCaskey and her family are involved in numerous charitable and civic organizations, most notably Bears Care. Through its outreach, Bears Care has donated millions of dollars to cancer research.

McCaskey and her late husband, Ed, also were instrumental in creating the Brian Piccolo Fund, which over the years has donated more than $2 million to cancer research, specifically to the type which took the life of Bears player Brian Piccolo.

She also personally supports notable charities such as Maryville, Midtown, and the McDermott Center. McCaskey leads by example as shown in her avid devotion to her religion, her family, and dedication to her personal fitness regimen.

Born Jan. 5, 1923, Virginia and Ed McCaskey were married for 60 years at the time of his death. She is the mother of 11 children, and has 21 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

FORMER NFL COMMISSIONER PAUL TAGLIABUE HAS AFFECTIONATELY REFERRED TO MRS. McCASKEY AS "THE FIRST LADY OF THE NFL."

Courtesy of Chicago Bears

Virginia McCaskey with her father and Chicago Bears founder, George Halas, after the team's 1963 NFL Championship.

BEARS TEAM OFFICIALS

Virginia H. McCaskey	Owner
Michael B. McCaskey	Chairman of the Board
Ted Phillips	President & CEO
Jerry Angelo	General Manager
Tim McCaskey	Vice President
Patrick McCaskey	Senior Director of Special Projects
George McCaskey	Senior Director of Ticket Operations
Brian McCaskey	Senior Director of Business Development & Alumni Relations
Karen Murphy	Senior Director of Finance & Treasurer
John Bostrom	Senior Director of Administration
Chris Hibbs	Senior Director of Corporate Sales & Marketing
Scott Hagel	Senior Director of Corporate Communications
Tim Bream	Head Athletic Trainer
Tony Medlin	Head Equipment Manager
Ken Mrock	Head Groundskeeper
Kendra Lindborg	Director of Ticket Operations
Tom Dillon	Director of Security & Safety Services
Bryan Pett	Director of Stadium Operations
Caroline Guip	Director of Community Relations
Dave Majercik	Director of Food Services
Brian Wright	Director of Football Systems
Bobby Slater	Director of Rehabilitation
Bobbie Howard	Director of Player Development
Dean Pope	Director of Video Services
Greg Gabriel	Director of College Scouting
Bobby DePaul	Director of Pro Personnel
Cliff Stein	Director of Player Contracts & Legal Affairs
Ryan Huzjak	Director of Corporate Sales
Stacey Larsen	Director of Client Services
Adam Kellner	Director of Stadium Sales & Services
Greg Miller	Director of Broadcasting
John Conroy	Director of Creative Services & Internet
Julie Taft	Director of Events & Advertising

LOVIE SMITH Head Coach

Scott Boehm/Getty Images

Upon becoming the 13th head coach in Chicago Bears history on Jan. 15, 2004, Lovie Smith set three stated goals: end Green Bay's dominance over the Bears, capture the NFC North title, and win the Super Bowl.

By the end of his second year, Smith had accomplished his first two goals. Now he has his NFC championship team on the verge of achieving the third.

Smith, who joined Mike Ditka as the only coaches in team history to repeat as division champions, was named the Associated Press NFL Coach of the Year in 2005 after an 11-5 season. En route to a 13-3 mark in 2006, Smith reached 25 career wins faster than anyone in club history except for the legendary George Halas (who did it in 31 games).

Smith came to Chicago after three seasons as defensive coordinator for St. Louis, where he helped the Rams reach Super Bowl XXXVI. Throughout his tenure with St. Louis, his defenses ranked among the league's best in both takeaways and sacks. Previously, Smith contributed to the revival of Tampa Bay's defense as linebackers coach.

Overall, Smith has spent 23 years coaching at the collegiate and pro levels. He entered the college ranks in 1984 at his alma mater, Tulsa, where he was linebackers coach, and later had stops at Wisconsin, Arizona State, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio State.

Smith played defensive back at Tulsa and developed into a two-time All-American and three-time All-Missouri Conference selection.

Born and raised in Big Sandy, Texas, Smith and his wife, MaryAnne, have three sons: Mikal, Matthew, and Miles; and twin grandsons: Malachi and Noah.

BEARS HEAD COACH: LOVIE SMITH

ASSISTANTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
Jim Arthur	Strength & Conditioning Assistant
Bob Babich	Assistant Head Coach/Linebackers
Mike Bajakian	Offensive Quality Control
Rob Boras	Tight Ends
Gill Byrd	Assistant Defensive Backs
Darryl Drake	Wide Receivers
Harold Goodwin	Assistant Offensive Line
Harry Hiestand	Offensive Line
Don Johnson	Defensive Line
Rusty Jones	Strength & Conditioning Coordinator
Lloyd Lee	Defensive Assistant
Kevin O'Dea	Assistant Special Teams
Ron Rivera	Defensive Coordinator
Tim Spencer	Running Backs
Dave Toub	Special Teams Coordinator
Ron Turner	Offensive Coordinator
Steven Wilks	Defensive Backs
Wade Wilson	Quarterbacks

BEARS ALPHABETICAL ROSTER

NO	PLAYER	POS	HT	WT	BIRTH DATE	NFL EXP	COLLEGE
97	Anderson, Mark	DE	6-4	255	5/26/83	R	Alabama
94	Ayanbadejo, Brendon	LB	6-1	228	9/6/76	4	UCLA
32	Benson, Cedric	RB	5-11	220	12/28/82	2	Texas
80	Berrian, Bernard	WR	6-1	185	12/27/80	3	Fresno State
70	Boone, Alfonso	DT	6-4	318	1/11/76	6	Mt. San Antonio JC
16	Bradley, Mark	WR	6-2	198	1/29/82	2	Oklahoma
55	Briggs, Lance	LB	6-1	240	11/12/80	4	Arizona
96	Brown, Alex	DE	6-3	260	6/4/79	5	Florida
74	Brown, Ruben	G	6-3	300	2/13/72	12	Pittsburgh
88	Clark, Desmond	TE	6-3	249	4/20/77	8	Wake Forest
81	Davis, Rashied	WR	5-9	183	7/24/79	2	San Jose State
22	Everett, Tyler	S	5-11	202	11/4/83	R	Ohio State
12	Gage, Justin	WR	6-4	212	1/25/81	4	Missouri
90	Garay, Antonio	DT	6-3	303	11/30/79	2	Boston College
63	Garza, Roberto	G/C	6-2	305	3/26/79	6	Texas A&M-Kingsville
85	Gilmore, John	TE	6-5	257	9/21/79	5	Penn State
9	Gould, Robbie	K	6-0	183	12/30/81	2	Penn State
14	Griese, Brian	QB	6-3	214	3/18/75	9	Michigan
8	Grossman, Rex	QB	6-1	217	8/23/80	4	Florida
46	Harris, Chris	S	6-0	205	8/6/82	2	Louisiana-Monroe
23	Hester, Devin	CB	5-11	186	7/28/81	R	Miami (Florida)
92	Hillenmeyer, Hunter	LB	6-4	238	11/4/82	4	Vanderbilt
71	Idonije, Israel	DL	6-6	270	10/28/80	3	Manitoba
53	Joe, Leon	LB	6-1	230	11/17/80	3	Maryland
99	Johnson, Tank	DT	6-3	300	10/26/81	3	Washington
35	Johnson, Todd	S	6-1	200	12/7/81	3	Florida
20	Jones, Thomas	RB	5-10	215	12/18/78	7	Virginia
57	Kreutz, Olin	C	6-2	292	8/19/78	9	Washington
65	Mannelly, Patrick	LS	6-5	265	6/9/77	9	Duke
38	Manning, Danieal	S	5-11	196	4/18/75	R	Abilene Christian
24	Manning, Jr., Ricky	CB	5-9	188	8/9/82	4	UCLA
4	Maynard, Brad	P	6-1	186	11/18/80	10	Ball State
58	McClover, Darrell	LB	6-2	226	2/9/74	3	Miami (Florida)
37	McKie, Jason	FB	5-11	243	8/25/81	5	Temple
60	Metcalf, Terrence	G	6-3	318	5/22/80	5	Mississippi
69	Miller, Fred	T	6-7	314	1/28/78	11	Baylor
87	Muhammad, Muhsin	WR	6-2	215	2/6/73	11	Michigan State
68	Oakley, Anthony	C/G	6-4	298	5/5/73	1	Western Kentucky
93	Ogunleye, Adewale	DE	6-4	260	8/16/81	6	Indiana
18	Orton, Kyle	QB	6-4	217	8/9/77	2	Purdue
29	Peterson, Adrian	RB	5-10	210	11/14/82	5	Georgia Southern
82	Reid, Gabe	TE	6-3	252	7/1/79	4	Brigham Young
48	Runnels, J.D.	FB	5-11	240	5/28/77	R	Oklahoma
95	Scott, Ian	DT	6-3	302	6/19/84	4	Florida
78	St. Clair, John	T	6-5	315	11/8/81	7	Virginia
76	Tait, John	T	6-6	312	7/15/77	8	Brigham Young
33	Tillman, Charles	CB	6-1	196	1/26/75	4	Louisiana-Lafayette
27	Turnbull, Nick	S	6-2	222	2/23/81	R	Florida International
54	Urlacher, Brian	LB	6-4	258	5/25/78	7	New Mexico
31	Vasher, Nathan	CB	5-10	180	11/17/81	3	Texas
21	Wesley, Dante	CB	6-1	210	4/5/79	5	Arkansas-Pine Bluff
59	Wilson, Rod	LB	6-2	230	11/12/81	1	South Carolina
44	Worrell, Cameron	S	5-11	194	12/14/79	3	Fresno State

CHICAGO BEARS

Mark Anderson (97)
Defensive End

Brendon Ayanbadejo (94)
Linebacker

Cedric Benson (32)
Running Back

Bernard Berrian (80)
Wide Receiver

Alfonso Boone (70)
Defensive Tackle

Mark Bradley (16)
Wide Receiver

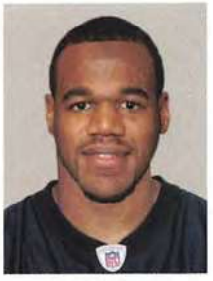
Lance Briggs (55)
Linebacker

Alex Brown (96)
Defensive End

Ruben Brown (74)
Guard

Desmond Clark (88)
Tight End

Rashied Davis (81)
Wide Receiver

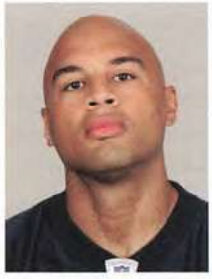


Tyler Everett (22)
Safety

Justin Gage (12)
Wide Receiver

Antonio Garay (90)
Defensive Tackle

Roberto Garza (63)
Guard/Center

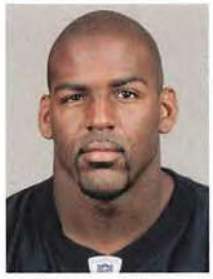


John Gilmore (85)
Tight End

Robbie Gould (9)
Placekicker

Brian Griese (14)
Quarterback

Rex Grossman (8)
Quarterback



Chris Harris (46)
Safety

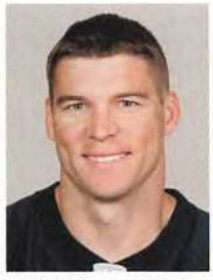
Devin Hester (23)
Cornerback

Hunter Hillenmeyer (92)
Linebacker

Israel Idonije (71)
Defensive Line

Leon Joe (53)
Linebacker

Tank Johnson (99)
Defensive Tackle



Todd Johnson (35)
Safety

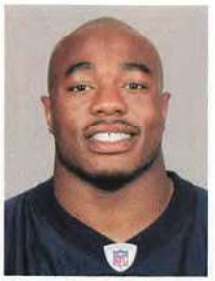
Thomas Jones (20)
Running Back

NFC CHAMPION

Olin Kreutz (57)
Center

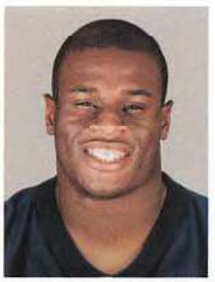
Patrick Mannelly (65)
Long Snapper

Danieal Manning (38)
Safety



Ricky Manning Jr. (24)
Cornerback

Brad Maynard (4)
Punter

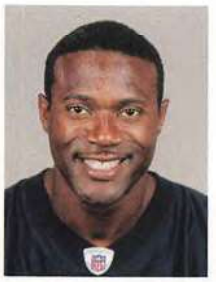


Darrell McClover (58)
Linebacker

Jason McKie (37)
Fullback

Terrence Metcalf (60)
Guard

Fred Miller (69)
Tackle



Muhsin Muhammad (87)
Wide Receiver

Anthony Oakley (68)
Center/Guard

Adewale Ogunleye (93)
Defensive End

Kyle Orton (18)
Quarterback

Adrian Peterson (29)
Running Back

Gabe Reid (82)
Tight End

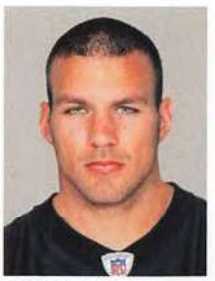
J.D. Runnels (48)
Fullback

Ian Scott (95)
Defensive Tackle

John St. Clair (78)
Tackle

John Tait (76)
Tackle

Charles Tillman (33)
Cornerback



Nick Turnbull (27)
Safety

Brian Urlacher (54)
Linebacker

Nathan Vasher (31)
Cornerback

Dante Wesley (21)
Cornerback

Rod Wilson (59)
Linebacker

Cameron Worrell (44)
Safety

SUPER SITE

GREAT WEATHER. GREAT TRADITION. GREAT GAMES. IT'S NO SECRET WHY THE NFL KEEPS BRINGING THE SUPER BOWL BACK TO SOUTH FLORIDA.

by Clark Judge

The Super Bowl was born in the L.A. Coliseum, but it was made in Miami. Until the New York Jets and Baltimore Colts arrived in South Florida in January 1969, the championship game was viewed as little more than a public execution. Then the Jets met the Colts at the Orange Bowl, and the face of pro football changed forever. ■ "That victory made the Super Bowl," says Dave Klein, one of four writers to cover every Super Bowl. "It gave it life." ■ It made history, too, with the Jets pulling off the unlikeliest of upsets. But, then, history usually happens when the Super Bowl rolls down Route 95 and pushes south at West Palm Beach. ■ Quick now, where did Vince Lombardi finish his career with the Packers? It was Miami. What about Bill Walsh's last call with the 49ers? Miami. How about the greatest gamble in Super Bowl history? Yep, Chuck Noll in Miami. And John Elway's last bow? I think you can answer that one. ■ Enough already. Let's rewind the videotape to see why the VIII Super Bowls in South Florida are games we cannot, and should not, forget.

A LEGEND EXITS

It was during Green Bay's mid-week preparation for Super Bowl II—Wednesday, by guard Jerry Kramer's recollection—that coach Vince Lombardi surprised his players by closing an otherwise ordinary team meeting in extraordinary fashion.

"He said, 'This may be the last time some of us are together,'" recalls Kramer. "And then he didn't say anything else. And he was serious. I remember looking at Bart [Starr, the team's quarterback] and saying, 'What the heck does that mean?'"

The Packers would find out weeks later. For on that Sunday afternoon in Miami, Lombardi coached his last game for Green Bay. His team would defeat Oakland, 33-14, and he'd be carried off the field on the broad shoulders of Kramer and Forrest Gregg, never again to return to the Packers sideline.

SUPER BOWL II

The Super Bowl's first visit to South Florida marked Vince Lombardi's final game as Green Bay's coach.

Tony Tomsic/WireImage.com

Starr said he had "no clear indication" Lombardi was leaving. But Kramer was so certain something was up with his head coach that, shortly before the Packers left the locker room at the end of halftime, he urged his teammates to "play the last 30 minutes for the old man."

And they did, scoring the first 17 points after intermission to bust open the game.

"I felt sure that was it for him," says Kramer. "That's why I said what I did at halftime, and why we carried him off the field. I felt it was the appropriate way to have him end his career with us."

Lombardi would move on to Washington, where he coached for one year before succumbing to cancer. And Kramer would retire after the 1968 season and wear only one of his two Super Bowl rings.

It was from Super Bowl II.

"It's almost exponentially more difficult to win the second than it is to win the first," says Kramer. "The first time you can sneak up on people; the second time you're not going to sneak up on anyone."

Vince Lombardi did. He surprised his team by walking away.

"It's difficult to describe in words," says Starr, the Super Bowl II MVP. "We'll always be grateful for the experiences we had with him and the lessons we learned. He was truly a great leader."

THE GUARANTEE

Few heard what quarterback Joe Namath said the week before Super Bowl III, but millions would read about it...then and for the next three-and-a-half decades. In essence, Namath not only predicted the New York Jets would beat Baltimore; he "guaranteed" it.

With the NFL-champion Colts an 18.5-point favorite, Namath's words seemed little more than Joe being Joe. Bold. Outrageous. Controversial.

"We just saw it as Joe shooting his mouth off," recalls former Colts running back Tom Matte. "He was a flamboyant guy, and it was just like him to say something like that."

Then the game began and, suddenly, Namath's vision of the Super Bowl took shape. The Jets could play with Baltimore. They weren't out of their league. They weren't out of their class. And Namath wasn't out of his mind.

Final score: Jets 16, Colts 7.

"Everything that could go wrong did go wrong for us," laments Matte.

Maybe, but give the Jets credit: They lived up to Namath's words, felling mighty Baltimore without a slingshot. The king was dead. The AFL was alive. And the Super Bowl was complete, with the AFL in one afternoon achieving the credibility it had sought for years.

So what if Namath didn't throw for 300 yards or four touchdowns. It didn't matter. The Jets did what he said they would do—they even had a shutout going until the game's final four minutes—making Namath the patron saint of underdogs to follow.

"You see people today mimicking that to incite their teams to go out and conquer everything that's in front of them," says Earl Morrall, Baltimore's starting quarterback that day. "There was some talk that we were taking them lightly, but that wasn't the case. We knew they were good."

What they didn't know was that the Jets were good enough to produce the biggest upset the Super Bowl has ever seen, and Namath was the only one bold enough to imagine it—as confident before the game as he was afterward when he disappeared into the night with his right index finger raised, a signal that the AFL and NFL at last were one.

SUPER BOWL III

Joe Namath's bold prediction came true when the Jets shocked the Colts in Super Bowl III in Miami.

Darryl Norenberg/WireImage.com

Doug Pensinger/Getty Images

THE KICK

Thirty-five years later, New York Giants general manager Ernie Accorsi shakes his head as he recalls the field goal that gave Baltimore's Jim O'Brien his 15 minutes of fame and the Colts their first Super Bowl title. It happened at Super Bowl V when Accorsi was in his first year with the Colts, and it climaxed the most bizarre Super Bowl ever.

Tony Tomsic/US Presswire

Even though he didn't take a liking to the Orange Bowl's AstroTurf, Jim O'Brien became the hero of Super Bowl V by kicking the winning field goal for the Colts.

"I remember Dick Young's lead the next day," says Accorsi. "It was, 'I don't know if I just saw the most exciting game of my life or the worst.'"

He wasn't alone. Millions of TV viewers witnessed a Super Bowl so rife with mistakes that it was dubbed "the Blunder Bowl." But what it lacked in style points it made up for in suspense—with the decision in doubt until O'Brien nailed a 32-yard field goal with five seconds left, lifting Baltimore to a 16-13 victory over the Cowboys. The game still stands as the only Super Bowl to have a member of the losing team named MVP, that honor going to Dallas linebacker Chuck Howley.

It was the closest decision in the short history of the Super Bowl and ended exactly as O'Brien envisioned it. The rookie that week told reporters he dreamt the game would come down to a last-second kick—only he confessed he didn't know which kicker would win it.

Neither did Accorsi after watching the Colts jog through their last pregame practice Saturday at the Orange Bowl.

"This was bad AstroTurf," recalls Accorsi of the stadium's surface. "So we're walking off the field, and O'Brien says, 'You better not count on me. I can't kick on this stuff.' And I asked, 'Why?' He answered, 'Because I can't take a divot.'"

Accorsi didn't think much more about their conversation until the Colts scored the opening touchdown. O'Brien's extra point was blocked. Then they tried a 52-yard field goal. That one missed, too. Suddenly, he started to wonder if O'Brien—and the Colts—were in trouble.

They weren't, battling the Cowboys even until Mike Curtis' late interception gave O'Brien the chance to be the man of the moment. As O'Brien studied the kick, Accorsi thought back to their conversation the day before. And he winced.

"I was a nervous wreck," he recalls. "I was like a sophomore in high school. I looked to my left, and there were Bubba [Smith], Roy Hilton, and all these defensive players with their backs to the field, praying. The trauma of losing Super Bowl III [to the Jets] was big."

Stories would circulate later that O'Brien was so jumpy he tried to pull up a blade of AstroTurf to gauge the wind—which, of course, he couldn't. It makes for good reading, but it wasn't true.

"I knew he was a little nervous," recalls Earl Morrall, who held for the winning kick. "But I had confidence in him. I just remember telling him, 'Hit it straight through, and you'll be okay.' And he was."

THE GAMBLE

It didn't seem like a big deal at the time, but imagine someone today taking the risk that Pittsburgh head coach Chuck Noll did in Super Bowl X. He'd have to hire a defense attorney. Sure, Noll and the Steelers won, but not without assuming one of the biggest gambles in the game's history.

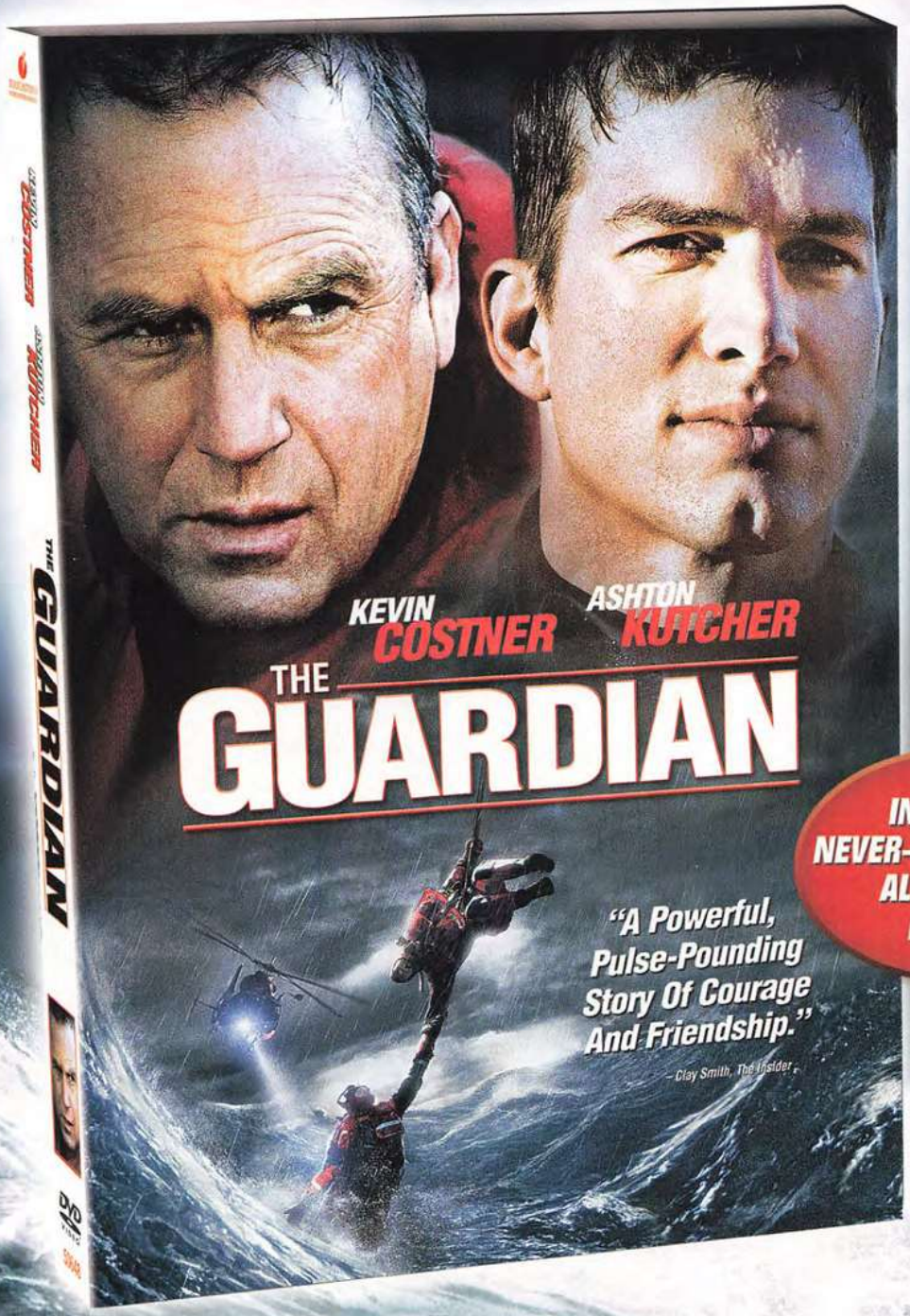
Consider the situation: The Steelers were nursing a tenuous 21-17 lead over Dallas, accomplished by the running of Franco Harris, the arm of Terry Bradshaw, and a momentum-changing fourth-quarter safety by Reggie Harris, who blocked a Cowboys punt out of the end zone. Now they faced a fourth-and-9 at the Dallas 41 as the Orange Bowl clock counted down. With a punt, Noll could pin Dallas deep in its own end—forcing Cowboys quarterback Roger Staubach to drive the length of the field on a Hall-of-Fame defense with barely a minute to play and no timeouts.

But Noll chose not to do it. Instead of calling on punter Bobby Walden, he kept his offense on the field. And instead of trying to throw for a first down, he had backup quarterback Terry Hanratty hand the ball to Rocky Bleier for a 2-yard gain.

First down, Dallas.

"We worked so hard to get the ball for Roger," says former Cowboys safety Charlie Waters, "because we believed that if there was any time left, no matter where we were, [he] could bring us back. So for them not to punt it and [instead] make the field shorter was...well, I thought it was asinine."

REAL ACTION. REAL HEROES.



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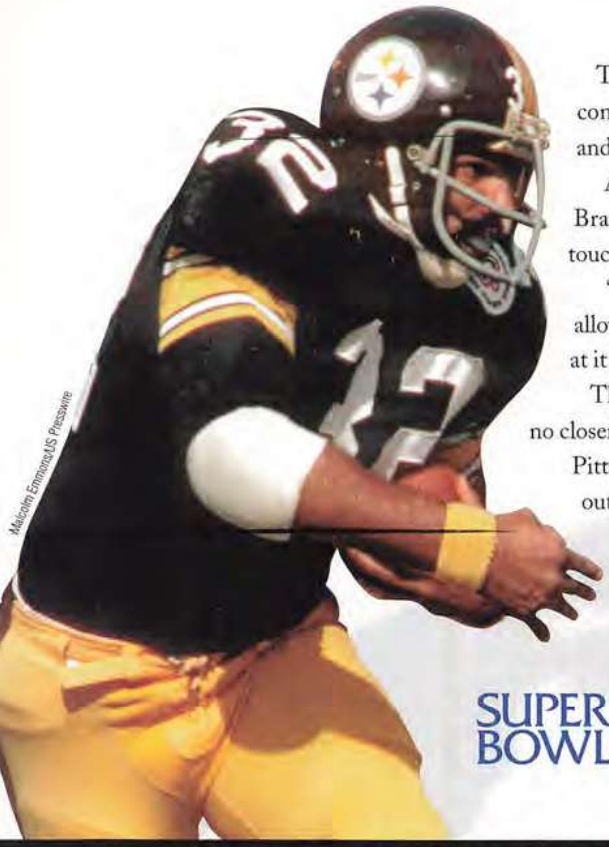


Malcolm Emmons/US Presswire

Franco Harris rushed for 82 yards in the Steelers' Super Bowl X victory, but the game is remembered for coach Chuck Noll's bold decision.

That's one interpretation. Another is that it was Noll's way of demonstrating he had more confidence in his Steel Curtain defense than he did in Walden, who had earlier dropped a snap and nearly had two punts blocked.

And forget about throwing for a first down. Not only was Dallas out of timeouts, but Bradshaw was out of the game—sidelined by a Larry Cole blow to the jaw as he released a 64-yard touchdown pass to Lynn Swann (who would win MVP honors) minutes earlier.

"Did we look at it as a gamble?" asks former Steelers safety Mel Blount, part of a defense that allowed just 270 total yards and picked off three Staubach passes. "No, not really. We just looked at it like, 'It's time to go back on the field, so let's do it.' We won four Super Bowls like that."

The plan worked. Staubach managed to drive the Cowboys to the Pittsburgh 38 but could get no closer, throwing two incompletions before Glen Edwards' interception ended the game.

Pittsburgh had won its second straight Super Bowl, this time by taking a bold—and, as it turned out, smart—gamble.

"I understood the rationale," says Waters. "Obviously, Coach Noll believed he had the defense to win, and it was the right gamble. When a coach makes a decision like that—if he succeeds he's a genius, and if he doesn't he's an idiot. He was a genius."

SUPER BOWL X

THE CORONATION

Three years after meeting in Super Bowl X, the Steelers and Cowboys returned to South Florida in January 1979—only this time with the stakes raised much higher. Pittsburgh had captured two Super Bowls. So had Dallas. That set up Super Bowl XIII as the game that would determine the "Team of the Decade."

"It was dramatic," recalls the Cowboys' Charlie Waters. "We knew the sense of the moment, and we all understood it."

Dallas had won the previous year's Super Bowl (routing Denver) with a club Waters called "a machine," so loaded with talent that the former safety said he'd "put it up against any in the history of the NFL."

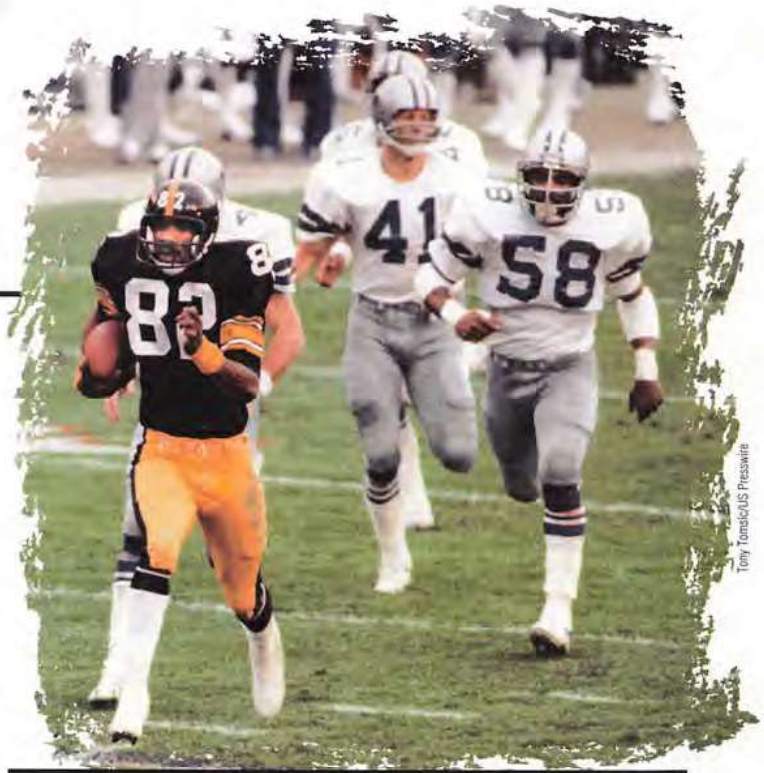
Which the NFL did. It had put them up against the Steelers during the 1977 regular season. Pittsburgh won, 28-13 at Three Rivers Stadium, one of only two losses the Cowboys absorbed on their way to the title. This was supposed to be payback time. Dallas loathed Pittsburgh. And the Steelers despised the Cowboys.

Talk about an even—and an even more intriguing—match-up.

"It was definitely fun playing Dallas," says Mel Blount. "I know it was just hype, but they were built up as 'America's Team.' Well, nobody made them 'America's Team.' There were a lot of teams out there that resented that."

Make the Steelers first in line, and they demonstrated it with a 35-31 decision that, in reality, wasn't as close as the score might indicate. The game would be remembered for tight end Jackie Smith's drop of a sure touchdown pass, but that was not the real story; the truth is that the Steelers asserted themselves that day as the premier team of the 1970s.

To this day, Dallas is haunted by a pass interference call on Bennie Barnes against Lynn Swann that Waters insists was "the wrong call."



Tony Tomsic/US Presswire

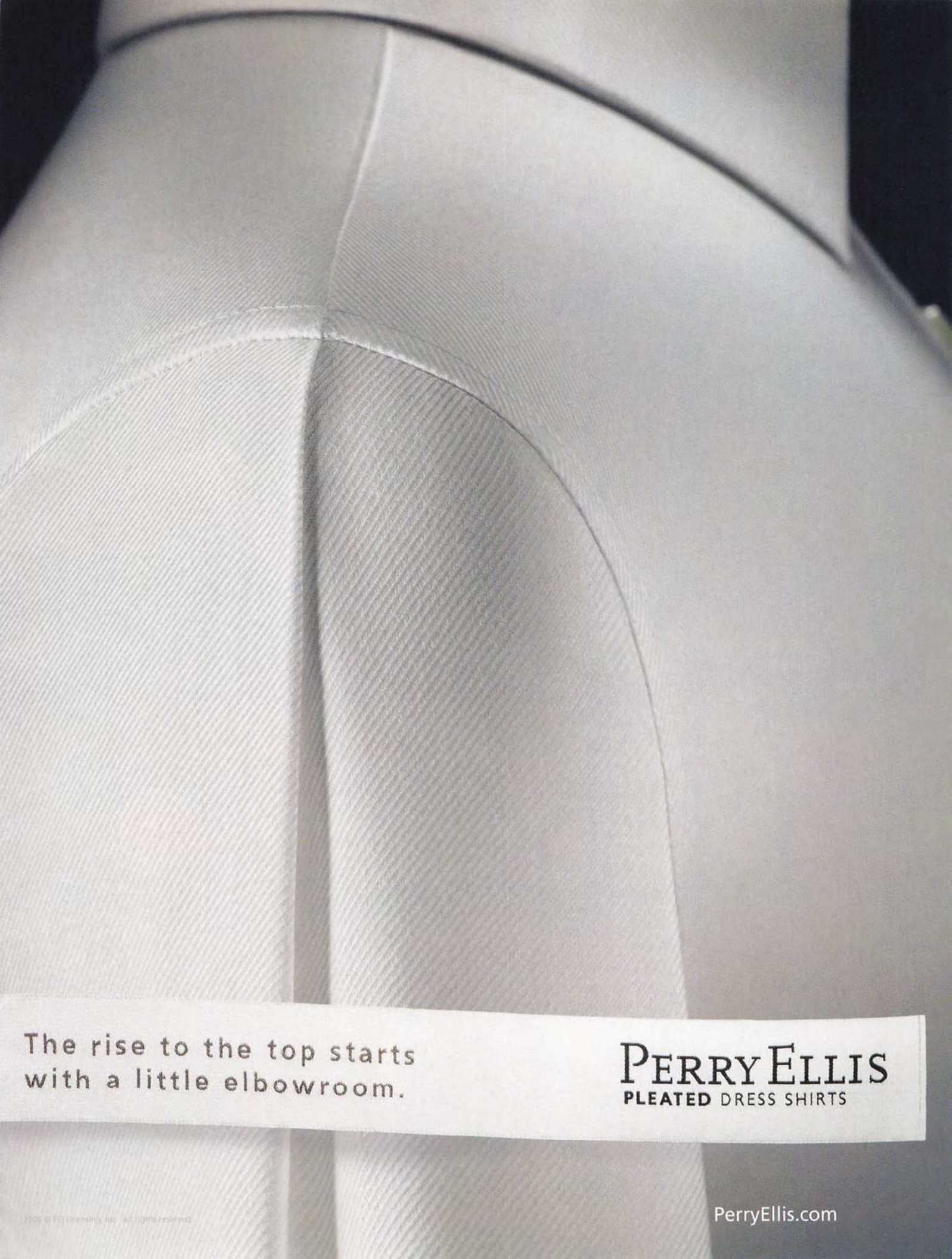
John Stallworth runs away from the Dallas defense for a TD in Super Bowl XIII, a game that crowned Pittsburgh the NFL's "Team of the Decade" for the 1970s.

Maybe so. But Pittsburgh hammered its foe, as if to pound home a message. That message came from Terry Bradshaw, who threw a pair of touchdown passes to John Stallworth and a third to Swann. It came from Franco Harris, who ground out 66 rushing yards, including a 22-yard TD. And it came from a defense that forced three turnovers and collected five sacks against the NFL's top-scoring offense.

SUPER BOWL XII

"That," says Blount, who grabbed an interception in the victory, "was a statement game. We had beaten them before, and they felt they should've won. So we beat them again.

"The Cowboys' problem was that they weren't the best team in football. We were. And when we beat them a second time, that was confirmation of it."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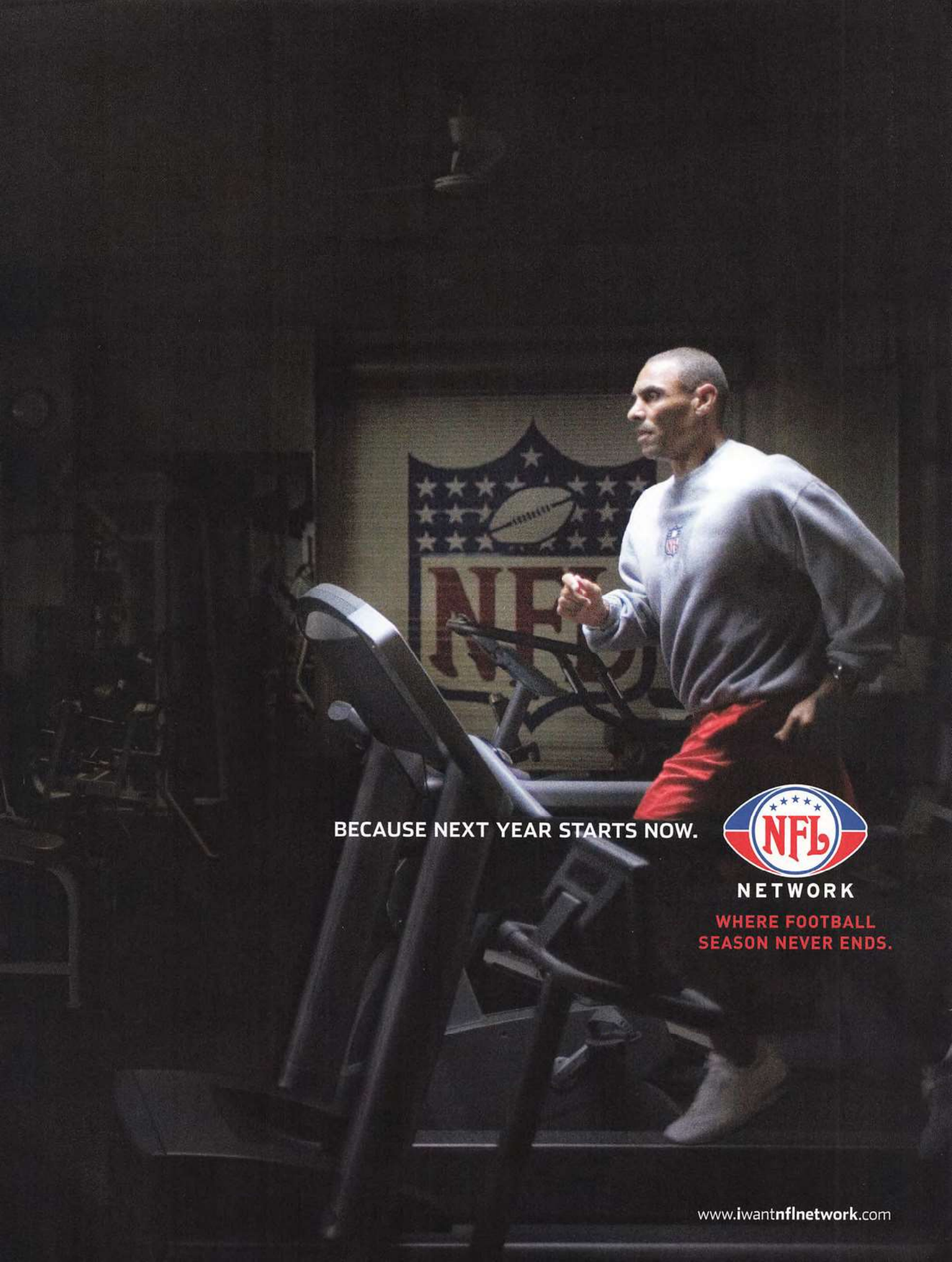
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A FOND FINAL MEMORY

It was long before Super Bowl XXIII that San Francisco coach Bill Walsh decided to retire. Like Vince Lombardi in 1967, Walsh was wrung out by a season where his club fought its way into the playoffs, and he needed a break. So he would resign, his decision unaffected by what would transpire against Cincinnati in the first Super Bowl played at Joe Robbie Stadium.

"I had told just enough people that I couldn't back down," Walsh recalls. "I had to go through with it. I didn't want to say anything publicly, and I certainly didn't want to distract the players because the stakes were so high. There wasn't any reason to think they would win one for the coach. So, rather than distract them, it was business as usual."

Well, almost.

"I remember going on the field prior to the game," says Walsh, "and walking around, reflecting one last time where I was, and where I was headed. This was going to be it.

"There was a lot of emotion that I had to keep to myself. I had to block everything out and focus on what I was doing."

He managed, though not without some difficulty. The contest went down to the wire. After Jim Breech's third field goal of the game, a 40-yarder with 3:20 to go, put Cincinnati in front, 16-13, Joe Montana drove San Francisco 92 yards for the winning score. He capped the drive, the game, and Walsh's 49ers coaching career by threading a 10-yard touchdown pass to John Taylor with 34 seconds remaining.

Afterward, an emotional Walsh told his jubilant players that he was stepping down as their head coach.

"It was more than tears," says Carmen Policy, then the team's president. "It was a breakdown, a meltdown. The season had been pretty rough, and it was a tough one for him. When all the pressure was off, the emotions free-flowed."

It was the third and final Super Bowl win for Walsh, who had infused the 49ers with an identity and a stretch of success that few—if any—teams in the league could match.

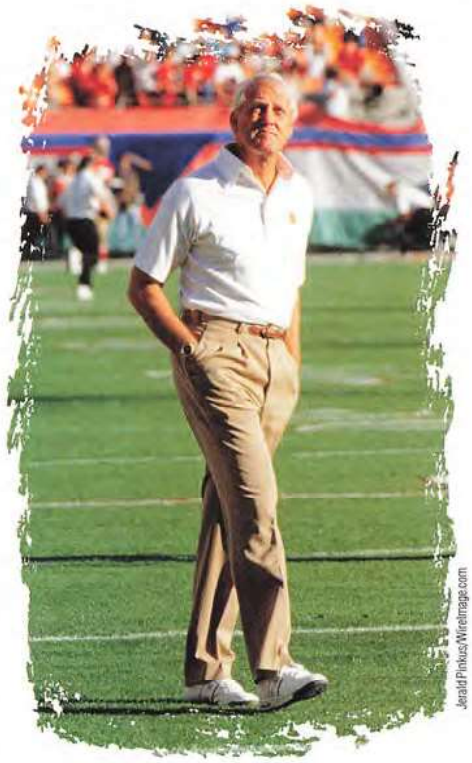
And it was a significant win. It solidified his reputation as one of the game's greatest coaches, and it assured him a place in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

"The biggest win, of course, was my first Super Bowl [also over Cincinnati, in Super Bowl XVI]," says Walsh, "but that last one was the most meaningful because I could step away with pride of the accomplishment.

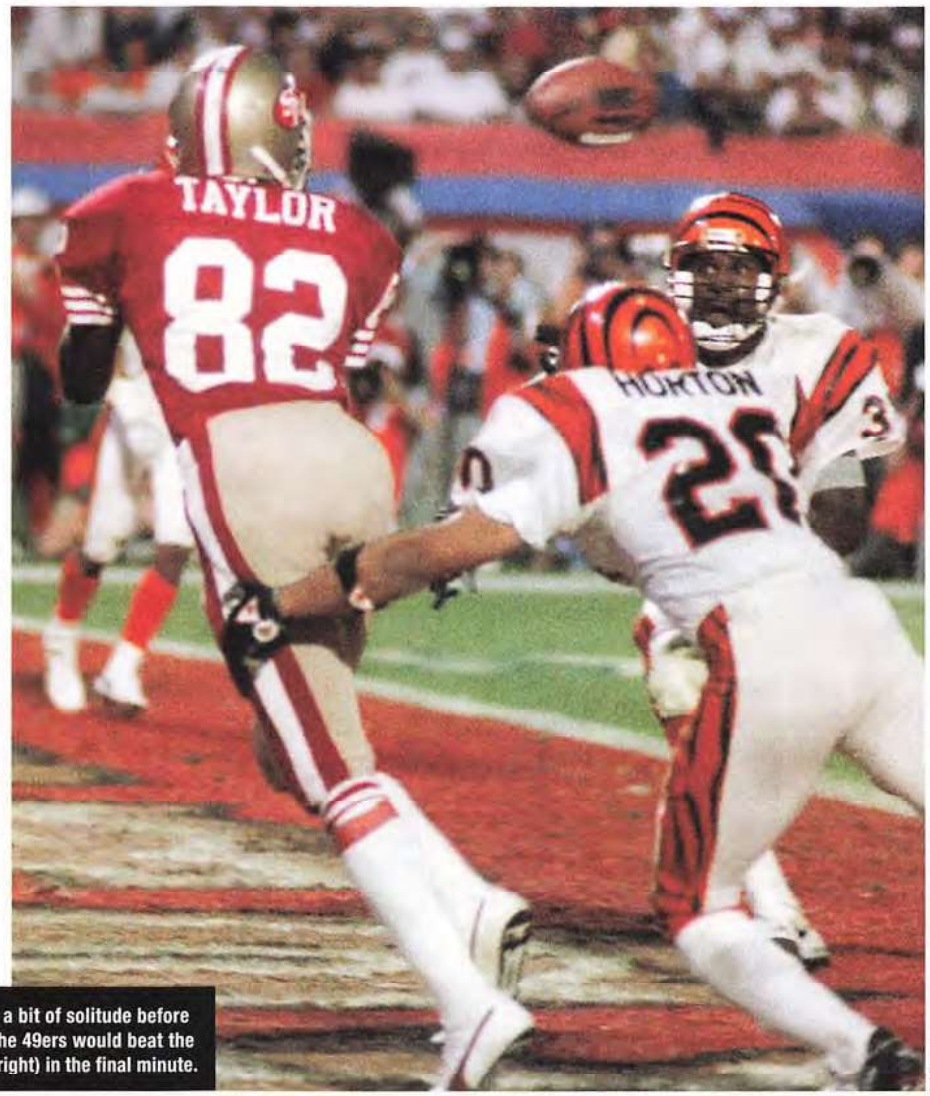
"Should I have continued coaching? Yes," he now acknowledges.

"If I had taken a break for a month, I would've continued. But at that point I stated what I was going to do, and I had no regrets until several years later when I thought, gee, you could've won two or three more Super Bowls.

"It was just fortunate to have won the game the way we did."



Jerald Pinkus/WireImage.com



US Presswire

San Francisco head coach Bill Walsh (top right) enjoys a bit of solitude before coaching in Super Bowl XXIII at Joe Robbie Stadium. The 49ers would beat the Bengals, 20-16, on John Taylor's touchdown reception (right) in the final minute.

THE VALIDATION

At one time, you couldn't mention Steve Young without also mentioning Joe Montana. Young was Montana's understudy in San Francisco and the next great quarterback waiting to happen to the 49ers...but only after Montana vacated the position.

That happened in 1993 when Montana was traded to Kansas City, leaving Young not only to take over the starting role, but also to start suffering the comparisons to his predecessor. And suffer he did.

Young was a marvelous quarterback. He threw with accuracy. He ran to daylight. He was handsome. He was articulate. He was popular. And he won. He won games. He won MVP awards. He won passing titles. You name it.

Only one problem: He hadn't won a Super Bowl.

Joe had, of course, and those in the Bay Area never tired of reminding Young of that flaw on his résumé. In fact, Montana had done it four times, while Young...well, he not only whiffed; he hadn't even reached the game as a starter. And, in the eyes of those who followed the 49ers, that meant one thing: You couldn't love him as you loved Joe.

Young would have to win a big game to win over his critics, and Super Bowl XXIX in Miami was his opportunity.

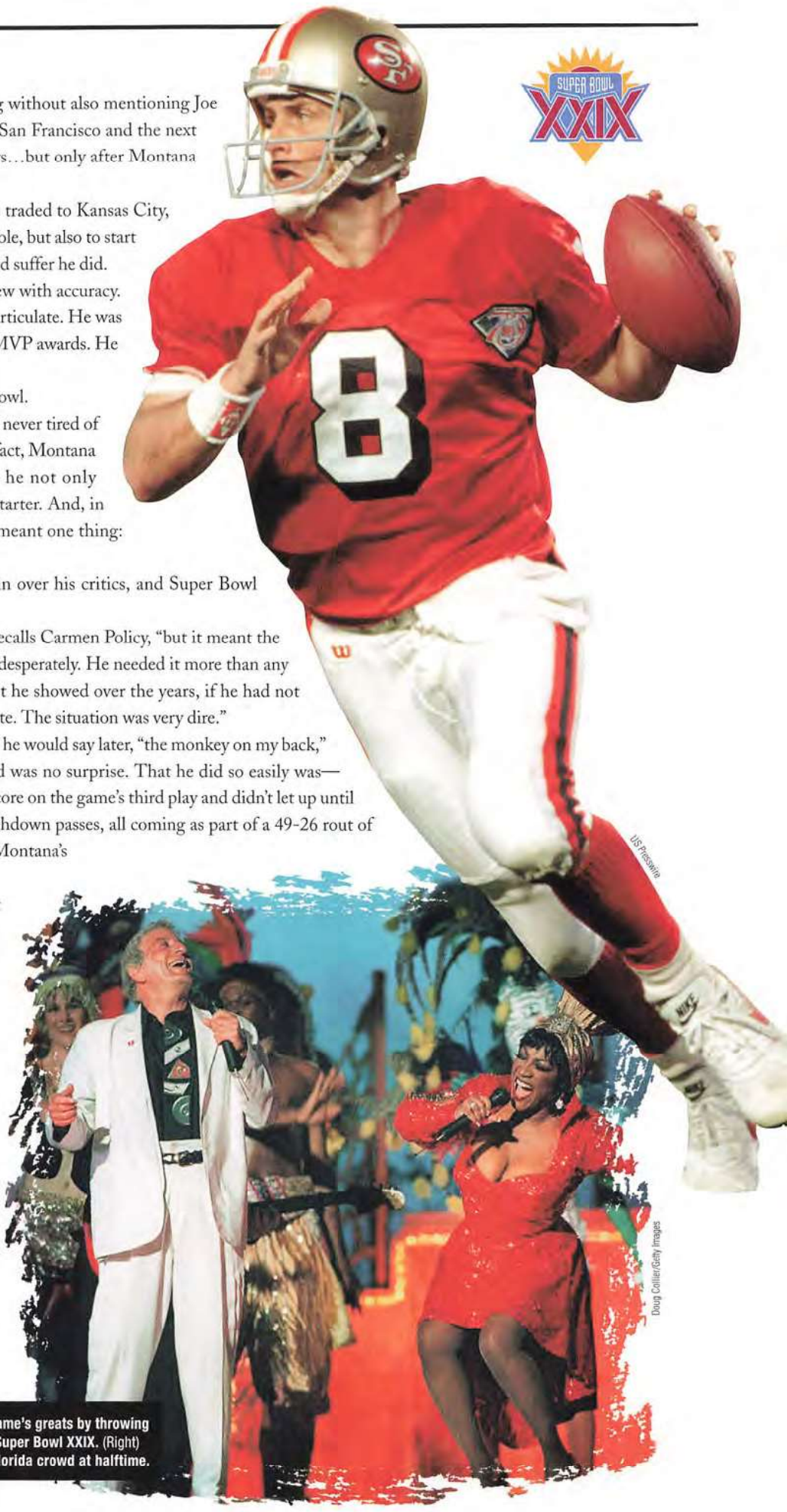
"That game meant a lot to a lot of people," recalls Carmen Policy, "but it meant the most to Steve Young. For his sake, he needed it desperately. He needed it more than any of us. Because, despite all the courage and heart he showed over the years, if he had not won that game he might have ended up a footnote. The situation was very dire."

Young knew it, and he embraced it. It was, as he would say later, "the monkey on my back," and he was determined to shake it. That he did was no surprise. That he did so easily was—Young connected with Jerry Rice for a 44-yard score on the game's third play and didn't let up until he set a Super Bowl record by throwing six touchdown passes, all coming as part of a 49-26 rout of the San Diego Chargers. Appropriately, it was Montana's record he broke.

"And that," says Brent Jones, the 49ers tight end who caught two passes that day, "was when Steve was validated. Come to think of it, that's how most of the great ones are measured."

Ten years later Young would be inducted into the Hall of Fame, the committee voting him in when it convened in Florida—and how appropriate. Because without Florida, and without Super Bowl XXIX, Steve Young might not have found his way to Canton.

"I was so proud of what he accomplished that afternoon," says Denver coach Mike Shanahan, who was then the 49ers' offensive coordinator. "It was as much pressure as any one player could have. It was a situation where you either get over the hump or you don't, and for him to play as he did in a game of that magnitude really defined his career."



Steve Young (top right) solidified his place among the game's greats by throwing for six touchdowns in the 49ers' win over San Diego in Super Bowl XXIX. (Right) **Tony Bennett and Patti LaBelle entertained the South Florida crowd at halftime.**

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ELWAY EXITS A CHAMPION

Leading up to the game there was a suspicion that Super Bowl XXXIII in South Florida would serve as Denver quarterback John Elway's curtain call; that it would be as much a retirement party as it would a football game.

Elway was 38 and had been through numerous injuries. His productivity was beginning to slip, with the Broncos' offense more about running back Terrell Davis than it was Elway. And with a second straight Super Bowl ahead, it seemed the perfect way to end a career.

So when Elway circled Mile High Stadium after the AFC title game, waving the championship trophy to adoring spectators, it seemed as if he was waving goodbye.

He was.

Tim Clary/Getty Images

Tim Clary/Getty Images

John Elway (below) capped his Hall of Fame career by leading the Broncos to a 34-19 victory over the Falcons in Super Bowl XXXIII, earning the game's MVP honors. Miami's own Gloria Estefan (right) was among the halftime performers.

First, however, there was that matter of an NFL championship. As it turned out, Elway and the Broncos dispatched the Falcons with relative ease.

On the big stage for the final time, few players have shined the way Elway did that day. He threw for 336 yards and one touchdown. He ran for another score, with Shanahan calling the QB's number for a 3-yard run normally reserved for Davis.

He won the game. He won the game's MVP award. And he won universal recognition as one of the NFL's greats.

"I was so happy for him," says Broncos head coach Mike Shanahan. "I didn't know if it was going to be his last game, but I remember thinking that if he has to go out after 16 years—and 14 years of people telling him he couldn't win the big one—what a way to conclude your career."

"All I know is that when that game was over, there was an overwhelming and complete sense of relief," says Mark Schlereth, an offensive guard on that squad. "We were supposed to win, so there was not a lot of joy in being the hunted as opposed to being the hunter.

"But when we crossed the goal line [for Elway's rushing TD], we knew we had won it, and it was a poignant moment. There were smiles and a sense of relief that, finally, it was over."

Clark Judge is a senior writer at CBS Sportsline who has covered the NFL for more than two decades, including as a beat writer following the Baltimore Colts, San Diego Chargers, and San Francisco 49ers.

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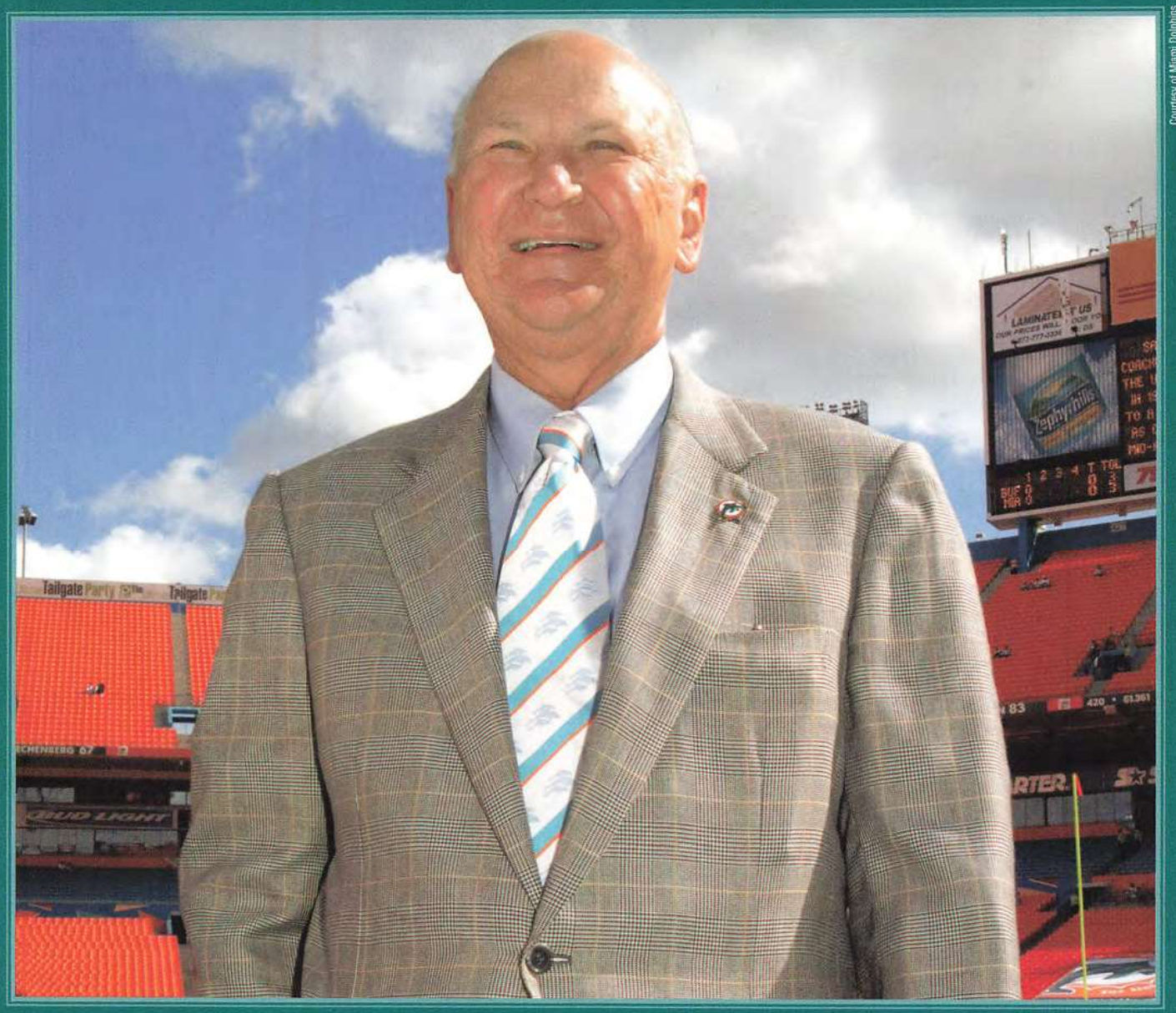


Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

FIRST FAN

Back in 1966, Wayne Huizenga became one of the Dolphins' first season ticket holders. Now he owns the team, but he's still a fan at heart.

by Dave Hyde

The Dolphins' No. 1 fan has been there from the beginning, all the way back to when Joe Auer returned the opening kickoff 95 yards for a touchdown in the team's first regular-season game. That was 1966. There were 26,766 fans on hand that September afternoon at the Orange Bowl—H. Wayne Huizenga was one of them.

"Went every Sunday," recalls Huizenga, who purchased four season tickets for that inaugural year when the expansion Dolphins finished 3-11 in the American Football League. "There were no backs on the seats then. You had to be tough."

The team's fortunes—if not its stadium seat backs—improved and Huizenga saw it all. He was there at the 1972 Perfect Season Super Bowl in Pasadena ("I remember Garo Yepremian making his famous throw.") and in Houston the following year cheering the Dolphins to a second Super Bowl title ("That team was better than the one in '72.").

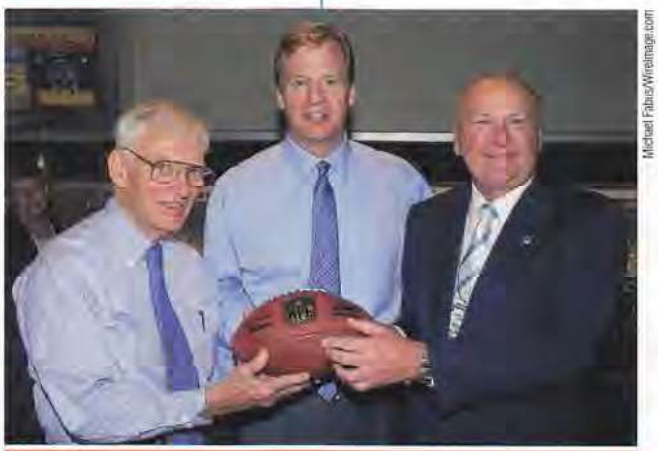
He would see a lot more winning football in the ensuing years, and in 1987 when the Dolphins upgraded stadiums—moving into the posh Joe Robbie Stadium—their No. 1 fan upgraded as well. Got a corporate suite. Stocked it with friends each Sunday.

"No. 234, right in the corner," he says.

A few years later, Huizenga upgraded his seat again. This time he bought the most expensive ticket of all. He became the team owner.

"That *wasn't* the plan," he says.

What Huizenga really wanted to buy was the stadium. But then-owner Joe Robbie would only sell half the stadium if Huizenga also purchased 15 percent of the team. In 1990, they struck a deal. And once he had partial ownership, Huizenga possessed the right of first refusal if the rest of the team went up for sale, which it did. So, in 1994, he bought it.



Michael Fabus/Wirelmage.com

Wayne Huizenga (right) poses with Steelers owner Dan Rooney (left) and NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell before this year's Miami-Pittsburgh game.

But even if his standing in the franchise suddenly changed, his mindset about the Dolphins didn't. His feeling on Sunday afternoons hasn't either. He's still the guy with four season tickets and no backs on his seats.

"When I go to the game, I'm no different than any other fan," says the 69-year-old Huizenga, the father of four who resides in Fort Lauderdale with his wife, Marti. "There's nothing I can do but cheer. There's a game plan that's been made that I had nothing to do with. And I didn't get the players. What I've done is hire the guy to run it all and try to give him everything possible to win."

Huizenga has tasted success in the sports realm. In 1997, four years after bringing the expansion Florida Marlins into Major League Baseball, the team won the World Series. He also introduced the region to the National Hockey League with the Florida Panthers; they reached the Stanley Cup Finals in 1996, just three seasons into their existence. The Dolphins have made seven playoff appearances under Huizenga's stewardship, though his yearning to bring the Vince Lombardi Trophy back to South Florida is still waiting to be fulfilled.

Even with that void, his magic touch is undeniable. How else does one explain the amazing tale of entrepreneurship Huizenga scripted by starting his own garbage collection business with a single truck and growing it into Waste Management, the nation's largest waste disposal company? Blockbuster Entertainment is another of his financial success stories. He bought the fledgling company in 1986 and aggressively expanded; within three years he had opened more than 1,000 stores.

He's the only person in America responsible for six companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Three have made the *Fortune 500*, another unprecedented feat.

Such accomplishments haven't gone unnoticed. The Calvin College alumnus was honored as the 2004 Ernst & Young American Entrepreneur of the Year, and a year later he received recognition as its World Entrepreneur of the Year. On five occasions, he's been presented *Financial World* magazine's "CEO of the Year" award.

It's then no surprise that Huizenga's business strategy spills over into his Dolphins management style, which is to let the football people run the show. That's the reason he's entrusted the keys to the franchise to those who grew up in the sport—among them Don Shula and Jimmy Johnson, who combined to capture four Super Bowl titles while coaching in the league.

NFL owners operate in varied ways. Some get involved themselves. Others run the franchise by committee. That's fine. Huizenga's time building corporations tells him there are many paths up the mountain. But his way in football is to lure the best football CEO possible, give him the resources to succeed, and not get involved in what takes place on the field as anything more than a fan.

"I think it's because of my business background," he says. "You bring in talented people like Jim O'Connor at Republic or Mike Jackson at AutoNation [two more Huizenga companies] and say, 'You're the CEO. You run the show.' You don't tell him who to hire or fire. He's got to pick his team, his financial people, who he thinks he can win with."

Still Huizenga has worked uncompromisingly around the edges to help his coaches and players. In recent years, the Dolphins have redesigned their locker room with new carpets, lockers, and even a skydome for added life. Huizenga has built a $10 million bubbled indoor practice facility so the team can work unaffected during inclement weather. He's installed satellite equipment so coaches can do film work from anywhere, and he's established team headquarters that can double as a safe haven during hurricanes.

But has Huizenga ever suggested a play?

"No," he says.

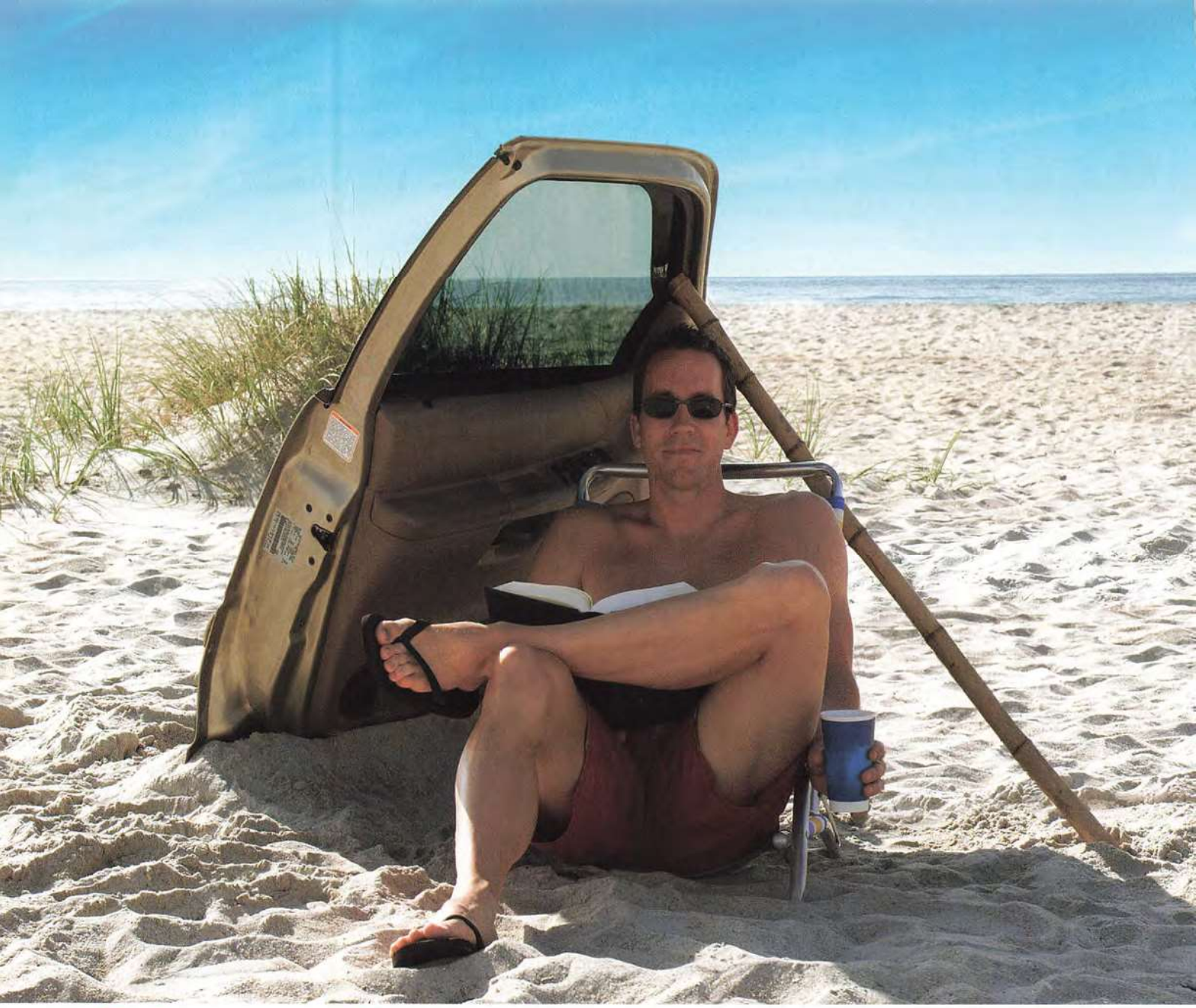
Ever demanded a player be signed or used in a game?

"No," he repeats.

Ever wondered why a coach did something in a game?

"Of course," he says, laughing. "I'm a fan."

It's a situation most coaches would dream about: No meddling. No headline grabbing. Just an owner who wants his team to succeed and will support his coach in every way possible to make that happen.



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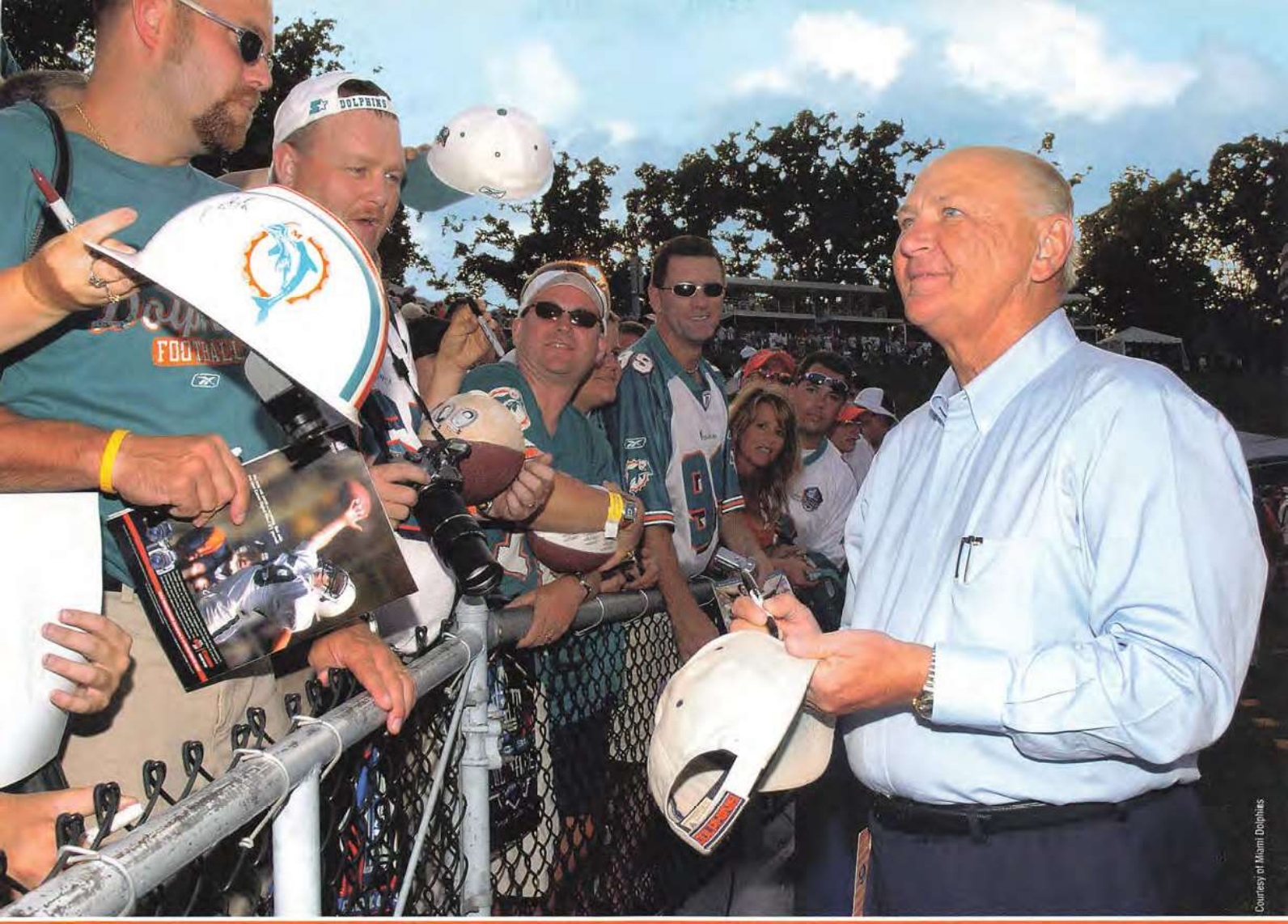


Courtesy of Miami Dolphins

Huizenga has been a major player in South Florida's sports scene. In addition to owning the Dolphins, he brought expansion franchises in baseball and hockey to the region.

Huizenga may speak to his coach a couple of times during the week and he's sure to give him a good-luck handshake before the game. And during the offseason, he's bound to show his generosity—perhaps taking a summer trip with the coach and his family or maybe offering a weekend golfing excursion for the staff. What he won't do is pretend to be a football expert in the same manner he is a business star.

"This may be a simple way of putting it," says Huizenga, a Chicago native who moved to Florida as a teenager and graduated from Fort Lauderdale's Pine Crest School. "But, to me, just because you buy a football team doesn't mean you know what the heck's going on.

"That's not necessarily the case in business. You buy a business that's delivering water or one picking up garbage or that's selling cars or whatever—OK, business is business. There are different ways and different industries, but business is business. I feel I can make a real contribution in business.

"Conversely, I don't think I can make much of a contribution to [the head coach]," he continues. "I don't have that kind of expertise. And the coach is not going to call me for advice on what should happen on the field. I don't expect him to."

So Huizenga, who has the business and entrepreneurship school at Florida's Nova Southeastern University named in his honor, focuses his efforts on what he knows best—business—and what he enjoys most—being a fan.

In his office are architectural drawings of Dolphin Stadium improvements. He's adding 360,000 square feet of space to the stadium (equivalent to a 32-story square block office building). There will be new atriums, restaurants, even places to watch every NFL game on television. A Dolphins Hall of Champions will be constructed to give fans a closer look at some of the team's all-time greats.

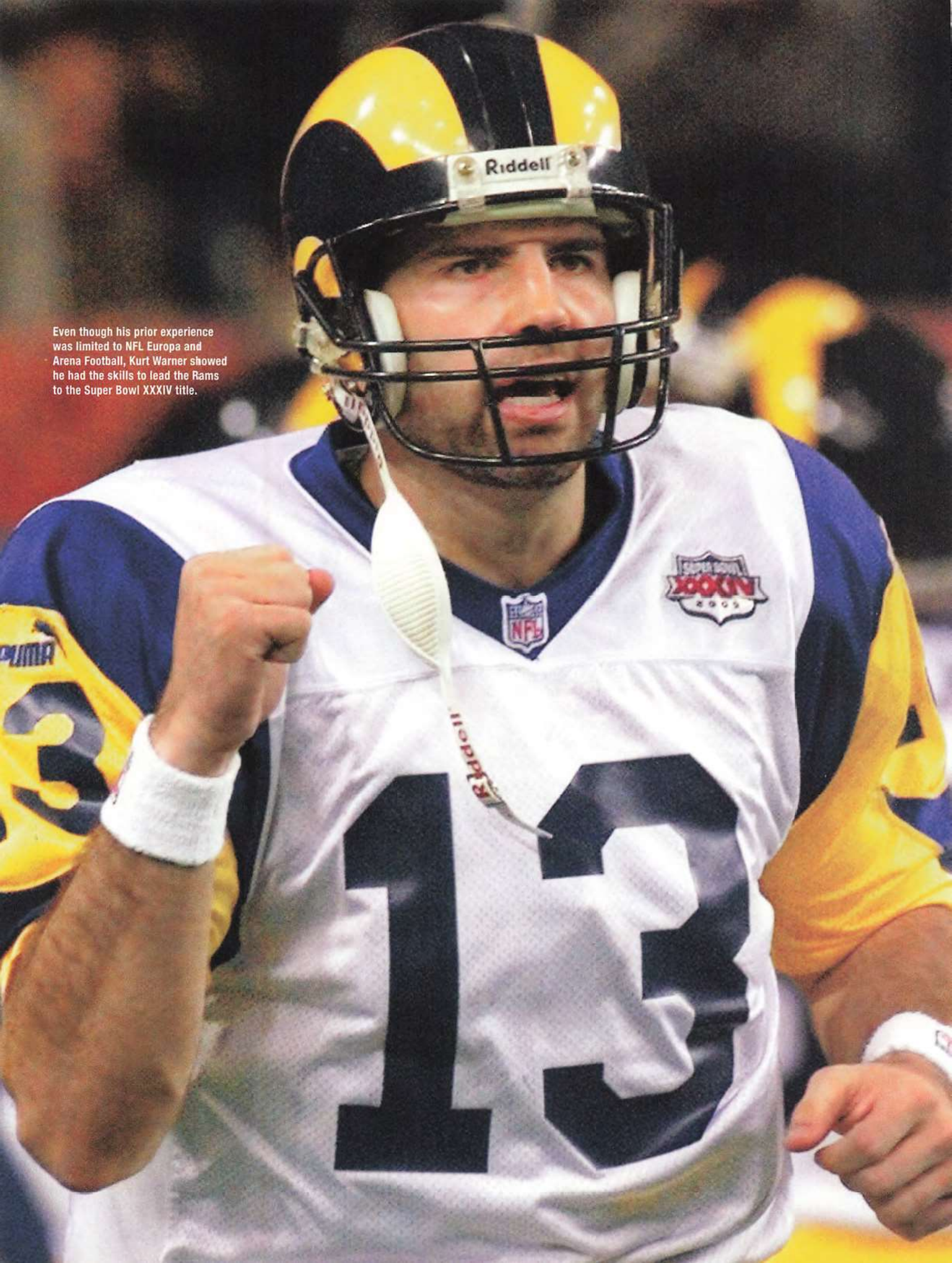
No additional seats or suites will be sold to pay for the construction, though. And all this is being done to meet the changing needs and interests of today's football fan.

"It's amazing to me that 20 percent of fans who now come to games don't sit in their seats," says Huizenga, whose family is involved with several charitable organizations, among them the American Heart Association, the Humane Society, and the American Cancer Society. "They sit in the club level. Groups of guys sipping beer and watching games on television. We had to improve their experience."

In his role as owner, Huizenga will take regular tours of the stadium, making sure everything works properly. On game-day, he'll stand on the sideline an hour before kickoff to watch the teams warm up. He'll shake hands with coaches and players and wish everyone good luck.

Then he'll go up to his suite and assume the role he's loved ever since 1966—the Dolphins' No. 1 fan.

Dave Hyde is a columnist with the South Florida Sun-Sentinel.



Even though his prior experience was limited to NFL Europa and Arena Football, Kurt Warner showed he had the skills to lead the Rams to the Super Bowl XXXIV title.

SECOND'S BEST

FOR A NUMBER OF SUPER BOWL-WINNING QUARTERBACKS, BACKING UP HAS ALSO MEANT STEPPING UP.

by Vic Carucci

In the NFL, backing up doesn't mean backing down. For if history has taught us anything, it's that any quarterback who begins a season as an understudy could easily finish it as the starter for the Super Bowl champions.

Although some cases are more dramatic than others, stories of the backup reaching the pinnacle of football success after assuming the No. 1 job are plentiful enough that they should not be considered the longest of long shots. Here's a sampling:

2001: Drew Bledsoe suffers a serious injury that causes internal bleeding, forcing the New England Patriots to turn to a young Tom Brady, who leads the team to its first of three Super Bowl titles.

2000: Trent Dilfer steps in for a struggling Tony Banks at midseason and is at the reins as the Baltimore Ravens capture Super Bowl XXXV.

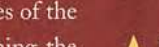
1999: Trent Green is lost to a preseason knee injury, but the St. Louis Rams ride Kurt Warner's amazing "Cinderella Man" story all the way to a Super Bowl triumph over the Tennessee Titans.

1990: Phil Simms suffers a broken foot late in the season, making Jeff Hostetler the starter as the New York Giants go on to a Super Bowl win.

1987: Doug Williams replaces an injured Jay Schroeder for the Washington Redskins and goes on to make history as the first African-American quarterback to play in and win the Super Bowl.

1972: What better setting than Miami to remind fans of how a 38-year-old Earl Morrall came off the bench in the fifth week of the season—after Bob Griese suffered a broken leg—to help the Dolphins remain undefeated through the first round of the playoffs. Griese returned to direct victories over the Steelers in the AFC Championship Game and the Redskins in Super Bowl VII, but the Dolphins realize they owe the bulk of their perfect season to Morrall, who two years earlier had replaced an injured Johnny Unitas in Super Bowl V and guided the Colts past the Cowboys.

These examples are evidence that NFL teams—particularly those gearing up for a Super Bowl run—enter each season aware of the very real possibility that someone will have to emerge from the wings to take them the distance. No, they aren't expecting their starting QBs to be injured or to flop. They are simply prepared for such an occurrence.



Always on call. Always ready to try and perform well enough so that the starter won't be missed, and maybe so well that he is forgotten. Such is the awkward, but necessary, existence of a backup quarterback.

"Teams realize it's not always easy to keep your starting quarterback healthy," says Jaguars backup David Garrard, who last season replaced an injured Byron Leftwich for five games and helped Jacksonville earn an AFC Wild Card berth. "So good backups can be like gold."

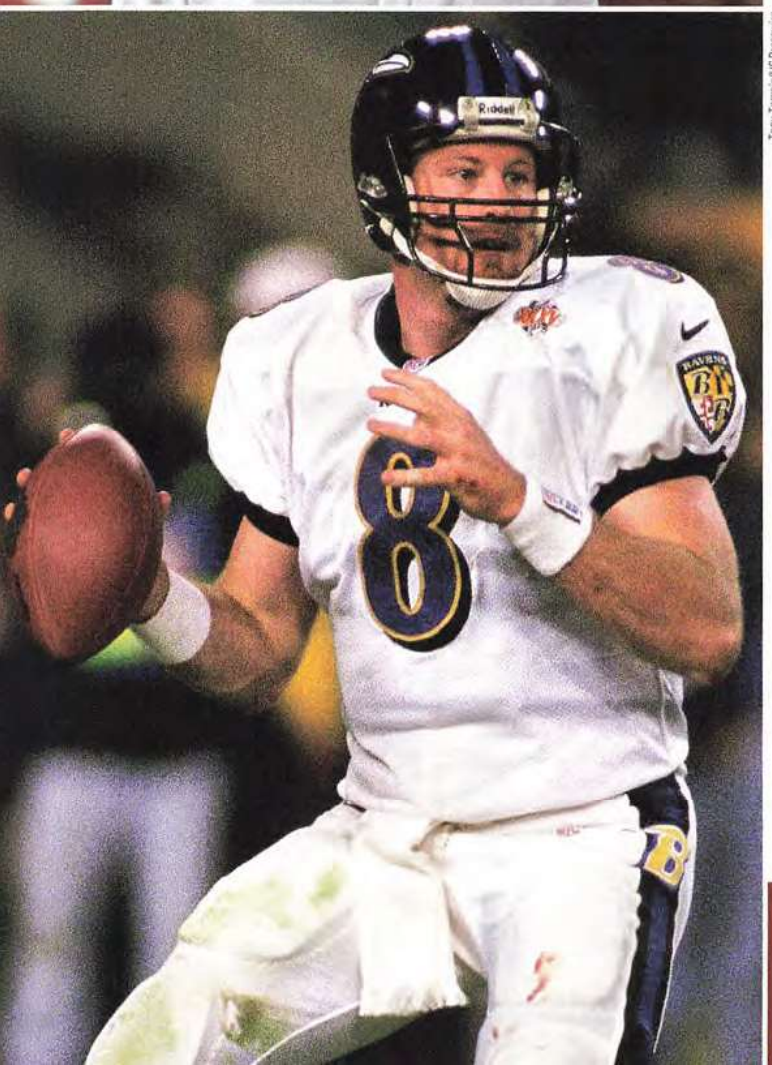
Dallas and Philadelphia discovered that in 2006. The Cowboys turned to young Tony Romo at midseason, believing his mobility was a better fit for their offense than the more seasoned Drew Bledsoe, the team's starter the previous 22 games. After the switch, they won five of six and ended up making the playoffs as a Wild Card. The Eagles had no choice but to go with Jeff Garcia when starter Donovan McNabb went down with a season-ending knee injury. All Garcia did was engineer a five-game win streak that propelled Philly to the NFC East title.

Both teams headed into the playoffs eager to add their names to the growing list of those to win the Super Bowl with a backup signal-caller.

Bledsoe has been through it before. He was a well-established starter for the Patriots in 2001 when a massive hit from the Jets' Mo Lewis sheared a blood vessel in his chest and sidelined him for several weeks. Facing what many would consider a most uncomfortable predicament, New England's coaches unflinchingly sent a young and untested Tom Brady onto the field. They didn't care that he was only a sixth-round draft pick in 2000 or that his lone regular-season action had come in mop-up duty of a blowout loss during his rookie year.

Doug Mills/AP WWP

Tony Gutierrez/AP WWP



Tony Tomsic/US Presswire

They were so confident in their young QB that they stuck with him even after Bledsoe returned from his injury.

"One of the things that immediately stood out about Tommy [as a rookie] was the great job he did in leading all of the other young guys on offense," recalls Charlie Weis, the Patriots' offensive coordinator at the time. "Right away we knew there was something special about him."

Still, his teammates understood they had to give him help rather than rely on him to make something happen, as they often did with Bledsoe. With Brady in the lineup, the chemistry of the offense changed—for the better.

"It begins with [having] the confidence of your teammates," Kansas City Chiefs president and general manager Carl Peterson says of the key to a backup succeeding as a starter. "Then it has a lot to do with the system, how interchangeable it is, how easy it is for the new quarterback to take over the controls."

The Patriots' offensive system was ideal for such a transition because it contained an assortment of plays that any quarterback, regardless of experience or style, could run.

"When you have as expansive an offensive package as we did, you can set up a game plan around what your quarterback can do relatively easily, just as long as you know what you're dealing with," says Weis.

At first, game plans were designed to avoid having Brady carry the bulk of the offensive load. When he did throw, most of the passes were screens and little dump-offs. Gradually, as the wins mounted and Brady's confidence blossomed, the play-list expanded.

That grooming was rewarded. After throwing 13 touchdowns and posting a respectable 86.5 passer rating during the regular season, Brady was at the helm for the Patriots' Divisional Playoff win over the Raiders, held in a snowstorm. Though he suffered a left knee injury in the AFC Championship Game at Pittsburgh, forcing Bledsoe off the bench to save the day, Brady was healthy enough to return to action for Super Bowl XXXVI—and Belichick and Weis decided to go back to him. He showed poise beyond his years while leading a last-minute, game-winning drive that produced a 20-17 upset of St. Louis.

"I never thought that letting Tommy take us the whole way through the postseason was risky," Weis says. "He was ready. He wasn't a young quarterback anymore. He had been starting since the third game of the year and practically had a whole season under his belt."

Brady's numbers were modest in that first Super Bowl win; he completed 16 of 27 passes for 145 yards and one TD. More important is that he wasn't intercepted, while Rams counterpart Kurt Warner—who threw for a gaudy 365 yards—was picked off twice, including one that Ty Law returned for a New England score.

Warner and the Rams could relate to Brady's story. Two years earlier, St. Louis was devastated by the loss of Trent Green, yet the coaches were steadfast in believing they had an answer in Warner. They were able to look beyond his humble credentials, which included working as a grocery store stock boy after a failed tryout with the Packers, and pro experience that was limited to three seasons in the Arena League and a stint with Amsterdam in

(Top) Tom Brady smiles from atop the podium following the Patriots' victory in Super Bowl XXXVI. A backup at the start of 2001, Brady replaced an injured Drew Bledsoe early in the year and wound up earning Super Bowl MVP honors. (Left) Trent Dilfer became the Ravens' starting QB midway through 2000 and effectively managed the offense as Baltimore captured Super Bowl XXXV by beating the Giants.

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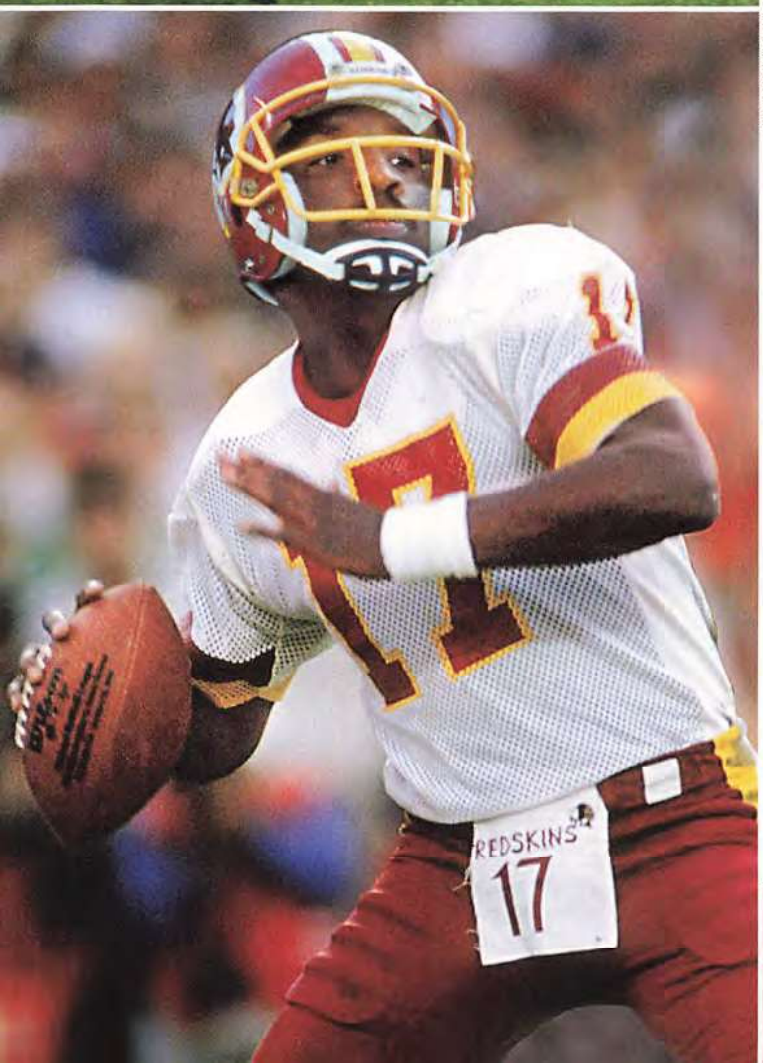


Elsie Amendola/AP WWP

the World League (now NFL Europa). They liked what they saw, even if the team did leave him unprotected in the expansion draft for the Cleveland Browns.

Yet not even the most optimistic projections had Warner becoming the NFL's Most Valuable Player in 1999 (when he threw for nearly 4,500 yards and 41 touchdowns). He capped that amazing year by earning MVP honors at Super Bowl XXXIV after passing for a Super Bowl-record 414 yards, the final 73 of those coming on a TD strike to Isaac Bruce that snapped a 16-16 tie and beat the Titans. But as then-head coach Dick Vermeil said of Warner's accomplishments, "He's no fluke," something Warner would prove by again winning league MVP honors and guiding the Rams to a second Super Bowl appearance.

"I always believed in myself," says Warner, who eventually moved on to the Giants and is now with the Cardinals. "There were no doubts that, if I ever got the opportunity, I could be successful. I continued to believe that through the times I worked in the supermarket and when I played Arena Football. I never lost sight of that.

"To me, that's what it's all about—believing in yourself, waiting for that opportunity, and then seizing it when it comes."

Trent Dilfer entered the league with high expectations after Tampa Bay made him the sixth overall pick in the 1994 NFL Draft. A Pro Bowl selection by his fourth season, Dilfer was injured in 1999 and replaced by Shaun King. One year later, he was sent packing, eventually landing in Baltimore as the backup to Tony Banks.

Banks struggled to move the Ravens' offense and Dilfer supplanted him at midseason. Starting the final eight games, he completed nearly 60 percent of his passes, threw for 1,502 yards, and had 12 TDs. In Super Bowl XXXV, when the Ravens beat the Giants, 34-7, Dilfer opened the scoring with a 38-yard toss to Brandon Stokley.

Baltimore's success that season was widely attributed to its smothering defense—the unit yielded barely 10 ppg—while Dilfer's role was dismissed as secondary. His job essentially boiled down to handing off to Jamal Lewis, keeping mistakes to a minimum, and allowing the defense to dominate.

All-Pro linebacker Ray Lewis rose to Dilfer's defense before the Super Bowl by pointing out, "He was good enough to get us here." However, a month later, before his diamond ring could even be cast, Dilfer was released. He has since played in Seattle, Cleveland (where he started 11 games in 2005), and San Francisco.

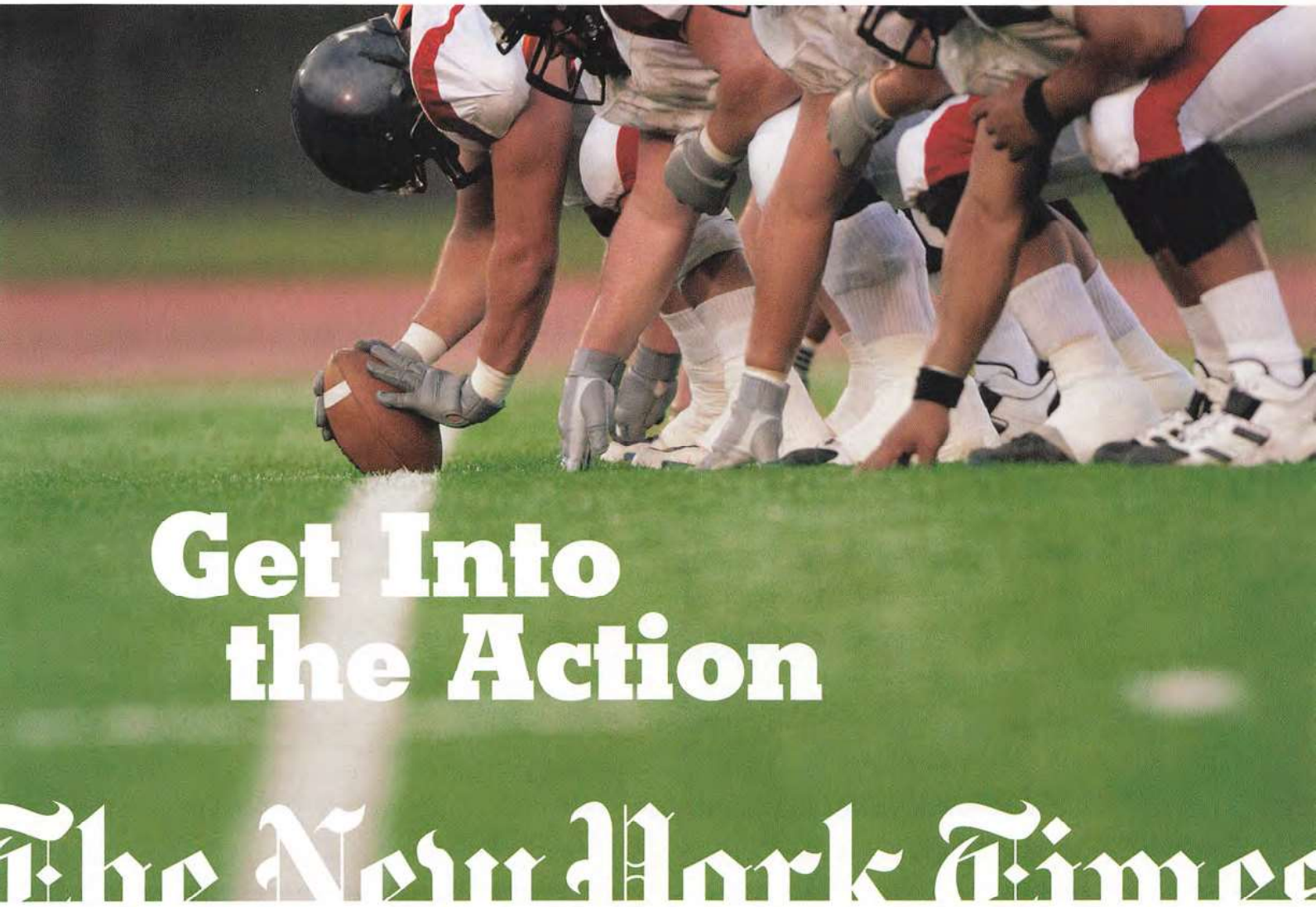
As humbling as that experience might have been, backups adjust to it.

"Those guys know their role," Buccaneers coach Jon Gruden insists. "Would you like to have three stallions in the stable? Sure, but the [league's] salary cap isn't going to allow for it. That's why these guys are where they are.

"They've played in the league. They're affordable. They have experience. They help in the meeting room. And if they have to go in the game, they usually won't screw things up."

It's about having a small enough ego to accept being the No. 2 guy, but a large enough brain to absorb the offense so that limited practice and playing time aren't a detriment when it comes to taking over as the starter.

(Top) **The mobile Jeff Hostetler stepped in after Phil Simms suffered a broken foot late in the 1990 season and took the Giants to their second Super Bowl title in five years.** (Left) **The Redskins' Doug Williams turned in an historic performance in Super Bowl XXII, when he directed five second-quarter TD drives in a 42-10 rout of Denver and became the first African-American QB to start and win a Super Bowl.**



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When Bob Griese was injured during the 1972 campaign, Dolphins head coach Don Shula handed off the starting quarterback job to Earl Morrall, who had played in a pair of Super Bowls with the Colts. Morrall kept Miami undefeated until Griese was able to return in the AFC Championship Game.

"A lot of it is just intelligence and understanding the game," says Dolphins offensive coordinator Mike Mularkey.

After Phil Simms suffered a broken foot against the Bills in the 14th game of the 1990 season, the Giants turned to an extremely intelligent and more mobile replacement in Jeff Hostetler. Head coach Bill Parcells and his offensive coaches moved Hostetler around much more than they did the pocket-passing Simms, maximizing what he could do best, such as make plays on the run.

Early on in Super Bowl XXV, the Bills' defense appeared to have Hostetler under control. Bruce Smith sacked him for a safety to give Buffalo a 12-3 lead, though the play could have been even bigger except that Hostetler refused to let go of the ball after being hit.

The Bills continued to knock him down and knock down his passes, but they never rattled Hostetler in the way one would expect of a backup QB appearing in the postseason for the first time and who had been running the Giants' show-team offense before Simms' injury.

His 14-yard TD throw to Stephen Baker just before halftime got the Giants close, and the team's ball-control approach produced an Ottis Anderson score and a Matt Bahr field goal in the second half. It also kept the powerful Buffalo offense off the field long enough to earn a 20-19 win, preserved when Scott Norwood missed his 47-yard field goal attempt in the final seconds.

"That game felt more comfortable than any other I played on the professional level," Hostetler would say later. "I didn't have any nerves. It just felt good."

Doug Williams had guided the Buccaneers to three playoff appearances, including the NFC Championship Game, after they made him a first-round draft pick in 1978. Following a stint in the United States Football League, he returned to the NFL in 1986 as a backup for the Redskins. He remained in that role until late the following year when starter Jay Schroeder was sidelined.

In five regular-season starts, Williams threw for 11 TDs, then led Washington to playoff victories over Chicago and Minnesota. But the day before Super Bowl XXII against the Broncos, he underwent a four-hour emergency root canal and was up all night on the eve of the game.

He then suffered a hyperextended knee late in the first quarter with the Redskins already trailing, 10-0. The resolute Williams managed to pull himself off the ground, then deftly guided Washington to five second-quarter touchdowns en route to a 42-10 win. He was named Super Bowl MVP and became a significant part of history...even if he wasn't immediately aware of the magnitude of his accomplishment.

The next day, he had a conversation with Eddie Robinson, his college coach at Grambling State.

"Man, you don't understand the impact," Robinson told Williams. "To me, it was like listening on the radio to the Joe Louis and Max Schmelling fight when I was younger. You will not understand this until you get older."

"Now that I look back on it, he probably was right," Williams says. "At the time, I did what I thought I was supposed to do and what everybody would have loved to be doing—playing in the Super Bowl and winning the Super Bowl."

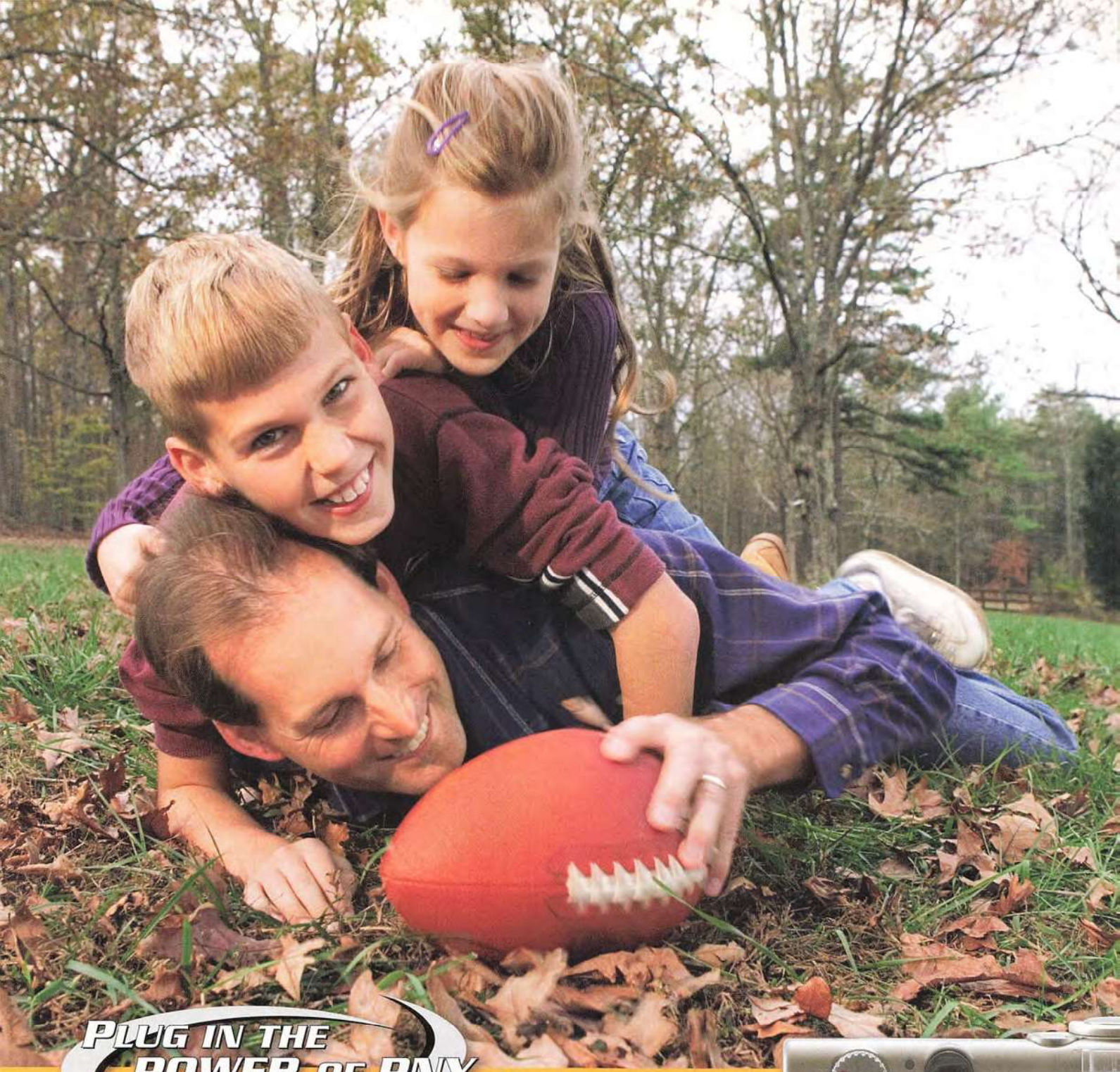
Don Shula, the NFL's winningest coach, knew he would get a focused performance if he ever needed to call upon Earl Morrall, as he did in 1972. After all, it was Morrall who replaced an ailing Unitas on Shula's 1968 Colts, and he produced an MVP season that included a league-leading 26 touchdown passes. Though Morrall struggled badly in the upset loss to the New York Jets in Super Bowl III, he made amends by coming off the bench in the second quarter of Super Bowl V (following another Unitas injury) and completing 7-of-15 passes for 147 yards and a touchdown to beat the Cowboys.

Benefiting from the presence of two 1,000-yard backs—Larry Csonka and Jim Kiick—and the league's No. 1 defense, the veteran kept the Dolphins on track to post the only perfect season in league history. Morrall threw for more than 1,300 yards and fired 11 touchdowns as Miami led the NFL in scoring at 27.5 points per game.

"That we had Earl made me feel a lot better because of what he had done for me in Baltimore," Shula says. "He was just that type of influence on our football team. They all realized that [Bob] Griese was our starter and the quarterback of the future. But they all knew Earl was capable of being a great backup, and he proved that to everybody."

He has had plenty of company through the years.

Vic Carucci is the national editor of NFL.com. He has covered the NFL for 28 years and is past president of the Professional Football Writers of America. He's authored eight books about football. His most recent, No Excuses, *written with Charlie Weis, was published in October by HarperCollins.*



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Breaking Barriers

FROM BILL WILLIS' HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH 60 YEARS AGO TO TODAY'S GLOBAL OUTREACH, THE NFL HAS LONG CHAMPIONED DIVERSITY AND GROWTH.

by Thomas George

Charles W. Follis produced awe as a professional halfback in the pre-NFL years. In 1920, when the NFL was still in its infancy, Fritz Pollard juked as a clever running back for the Akron Pros and a year later became a head coach in the fledgling league. Both were African-Americans who broke barriers.

But after Pittsburgh tackle Ray Kemp and Chicago running back Joe Lillard left the league in 1933, pro football regressed to become exclusively a white man's game.

It remained that way for the next 12 years, until four men of glowing skill and will, of persistence and distinguished class, permanently opened pro football's doors to all minorities. In 1946, this quartet of African-American players—backs Kenny Washington and Marion Motley, end Woody Strode, and middle guard Bill Willis—changed the course of gridiron history by ushering in a wave of diversity that has worked its way through every NFL fabric and spectrum.

Bettmann/Corbis

(Left to right) **Woody Strode, Jackie Robinson, and Kenny Washington were teammates at UCLA. Strode and Washington joined the L.A. Rams in 1946; one year later, Robinson broke baseball's color barrier.**

Even Super Bowl XLI and the journey to it that began in early September on a carnival-like, season-opening Thursday night in Pittsburgh is, in part, a celebration of the 60-year anniversary of these four men. What they meant. What they mean. And what the game has become.

Washington and Strode joined the NFL's Los Angeles Rams. Willis and Motley became members of the All-America Football Conference's Cleveland Browns. Washington had been the UCLA roommate of Jackie Robinson, who in 1947 would break Major League Baseball's color barrier. Strode, after his football days were complete, built a Hollywood acting career—his credits included the 1958 movie *Spartacus*—and later said of his grinding gridiron challenges: "If I have to integrate heaven, I don't want to go."

Motley is remembered as a mammoth, menacing player on the field but was extremely jovial off of it. He proudly carried a newspaper clipping in his wallet with a quote from baseball legend Branch Rickey: "Had it not been for Marion Motley and Bill Willis, their class and conduct in the contact sport of football, I would never have been able to integrate Jackie Robinson into baseball."

Willis is the last living member of this ground-breaking group. His path to pro football began at Ohio State, where he played for coach Paul Brown and in 1942 was a starter for the Buckeyes as they won the Big 10 title. Though an All-America selection for an undefeated OSU team as a senior in 1944, Willis knew his playing opportunities beyond college were limited, so he accepted a job as athletic director and head football coach at Kentucky State College.

However, when he heard that Brown was in charge of tryouts for the Cleveland entry in the newly formed AAFC—and through a Brown intermediary was encouraged to show up at those practices as a walk-on—he couldn't resist. On August 6, 1946, Bill Willis signed a pro contract. Motley inked his deal three days later.

"I knew it at the time—and then again, I didn't," says Willis, now 85 years old, of the history he made by signing. "We were just playing football.

"Motley was a little older than I was. We would get to the room and talk about what was happening in games and what might happen

Courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

Courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

Bill Willis (left) helped reintegrate pro football when he signed with Cleveland in 1946. At his 1977 induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame (above), Willis was joined by Paul Brown, who coached him in college and the pros.

in upcoming games. He would say, 'Willis, you can't just go flying off the handle. But, still, you've got to protect yourself.'"

The reason, Willis says, is that many white players didn't believe African-Americans should be playing pro football. Many fans felt that way, too. There even came an away game against Miami that Brown asked Willis and Motley to miss due to threats the coach took seriously. Willis listened to Brown. He respected him. He knew that Brown was a man of vision and fairness who opened a door for him in pro football at a time when few dared or could. He didn't play in the game.

"People talk about the good old days and many of them really are good, pleasant memories," says Willis. "But some really aren't that good at all.

"We used to get hit out of bounds. You had to have eyes in the back of your head. The play was never over until the next play started. They called you names, hit you late, and piled on. They did all kinds of holding. You had to show your opponent you could take it but also dish it out.

"I'd say, 'All right fella, let's play the game fair and square and not take the low road.' And if that didn't work, you just remembered it was a mental battle as much as a physical one. The play would be over and I'd just stay on top of the guy. I'd say calmly in his ear, 'Let's play the game fair and square because right now I could do some pretty good damage, you know?'"

The damage done by Willis was fair and square. And impacting. He played eight seasons with the Browns, including their 1950 transition into the NFL, and was a First Team All-League selection seven times and a second team choice once. He won one NFL championship, reached two other NFL title games, appeared in three Pro Bowls, and was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1977. (Motley, who retired in 1955 after rushing for 4,720 career yards, scoring 38 TDs, and averaging 5.6 yards per carry, had entered Canton nine years earlier.)

Willis sees Brown's legacy. He sees those of Washington and Strode and Motley. And he sees his own.

"Even in my home state of Ohio, you have Romeo Crennel in Cleveland and Marvin Lewis in Cincinnati, two black head coaches [in the NFL], and that says a lot and does my heart really well," says the Columbus, Ohio, native. "It really makes me proud to know I had a part in making the game what it is today.

"Football is America's greatest sport," continues Willis, who last May was awarded a Commendation by the Ohio General Assembly in recognition of the 60th anniversary of his breakthrough. "Think about where it came from to where it is now. You've got barriers broken in players, coaching, management, women, and across the globe; that helps make [football] truly a great game for everyone."

Pro football was replete with Native Americans and blue-collar immigrants in its formative years. The push for racial diversity that took place in the 1950s was followed a decade later by an influx of foreign players, primarily kickers, led by Hungarian native Pete Gogolak and Norwegian-born Jan Stenerud. Stenerud spent most of his career in Kansas City and in 1991 became the first kicking specialist enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

Ron Vesely/Getty Images

Hall of Famer Anthony Muñoz played 13 seasons in the NFL. Now he takes part in outreach efforts to expand the league's popularity in Latino communities.

"I've been retired for 20 years, but it's still great to talk about these things," says Stenerud. "The thing that made pro football so great for me was that every week I kicked like it was my last one. Kickers in pro football must meet high expectations from coaches, teammates, fans, and themselves. You have a couple of bad games, and you might not be around for long.

"There began to be a few foreign kickers making their way to the NFL around my time, and teams began to travel overseas to look for them. The game and the opportunities have grown so much that if you can kick [a football], you will be found. It's a fair shot now for all."

Hall of Famer Anthony Muñoz agrees. The robust offensive tackle entered the NFL in 1980 and played 13 sparkling seasons with the Cincinnati Bengals, leading them to a pair of Super Bowl appearances while earning All-Pro honors 11 times. Muñoz stood at the forefront of the infusion of Latin players into the league and has since become an equally important ambassador off the field, reaching across diverse communities to build interest in the NFL.

"Heck, I'm proud that I played so many years for the Bengals right next to a Latino, Max Montoya," he says. "I've always been proud of my Mexican heritage. There are so many initiatives for Latinos involving the NFL, and I am proud of that. There is a passion among Latinos for NFL football."

Muñoz also understands the significance of the breakthroughs that have taken place in the sport.

"When I think of someone like Bill Willis, I think of the prejudice he endured and sacrifices he had to make. It was not nearly as hard on me in that way. But I believe our responsibility is all the same, to accept our roles as pioneers as an honor and privilege. So many young people of all races look for us to do that."

Football's color barrier continued to crumble in the years after Willis' retirement. Burl Toler, a field judge and head linesman, became the NFL's first African-American official in 1965. Johnny

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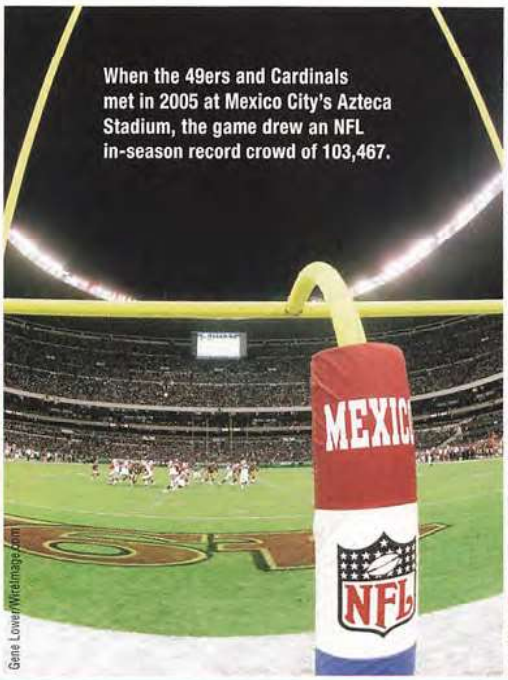
When the 49ers and Cardinals met in 2005 at Mexico City's Azteca Stadium, the game drew an NFL in-season record crowd of 103,467.
MEXIC
NFL

Gene Lower/WireImage.com

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In 1989, Art Shell (left) became the NFL's first modern-day African-American head coach. Rams owner Georgia Frontiere (right) celebrates her team's Super Bowl XXXIV triumph.

Grier became the first African-American referee in 1988. And one year later, Art Shell was hired as the first African-American head coach in the NFL's modern era.

"The thing I remember most about those first days is I was not just the head coach of the Oakland Raiders, I was the black head coach of the Oakland Raiders," says Shell, who won 1990 AFC Coach of the Year honors after a 12-4 campaign. "It took two or three weeks before that even began to subside. My approach was to not think of myself, but go about working to try to have as much success as possible so that the thing could go beyond me. And I feel in a modest way that I achieved some things there, set the groundwork for others to get opportunities and show their wares, handle the position in a professional way, and get it done."

Shell, a Pro Football Hall of Famer who played 15 seasons with the Raiders, held his coaching post until 1994. After several years as a senior vice president for the NFL, he returned to the sidelines last fall. Again it was with the Raiders, but this time he was one of seven African-American head coaches in the league.

Women are commonly found in varied roles throughout today's NFL, from management to scouting to marketing and beyond—all the way to ownership.

Georgia Frontiere, completing her 28th year as owner of the Rams, knows plenty about breaking barriers. She recalls Rams games in Green Bay when she sat in the stands freezing, clutching baked potatoes in her pockets to keep her hands warm. It was so cold that Packers coach Vince Lombardi would walk up and offer her coffee.

Yet Frontiere was more than ready to tough it out—drawing from her days as a youngster in St. Louis when she played football with neighborhood boys on gravel lots. She remembers her bloody knees and, accompanying it, an unending love for the game.

"I've always loved it and live and die with every game—the joy, the pain," she says. "That's what it's all about.

"There are common elements to people who break barriers. Training is essential. Knowledge. The ability to understand problems. Passion and love for your work. Pride, tenacity, the ability to weather the ups and downs. Plus, a very thick skin."

While efforts to expand opportunities for women and minorities are ongoing, the NFL also is focused on global outreach. NFL Europa, about to embark on its 15th season, is a part of that.

So is the NFL International Development Practice Squad program, where NFL Europa players join NFL practice squads and are directly exposed to the league's way of life. The 2006 program drew a record 109 foreign-born players to NFL camps. Participants have ranged from Cologne Centurions linebacker Philippe Gardent, a French native who last June was named co-defensive MVP of NFL Europa, to Jets punter Ben Graham, who entered the NFL in 2005 after 12 years of Australian Rules Football and, at age 31, became the league's oldest rookie ever. The goal is for these players to return to their homeland and serve as ambassadors while providing an international face for the game and the league.

After years of staging exhibition games in foreign countries, in 2005 the NFL took another bold step, playing its first regular-season contest outside the United States. The game—between the 49ers and Cardinals—was an unqualified success, attracting the largest in-season crowd in league history as 103,467 fans piled into Mexico City's Azteca Stadium. This August, the NFL moves beyond the Great Wall for the first time when the Patriots and Seahawks hold a preseason contest—the China Bowl—in Beijing.

So many barriers broken by the NFL. And always more to break, insists Willis.

"Whenever you do something for the first time, you especially fight to do it right," he says. "You appreciate and celebrate the past. But you keep your eyes on the future. And keep knocking."

Thomas George is managing editor of NFL Network. His award-winning journalism career began at the Detroit Free Press. *He was a* New York Times *NFL writer/columnist for 17 years. He came to NFL Network from the* Denver Post, *where he worked as a sports columnist.*

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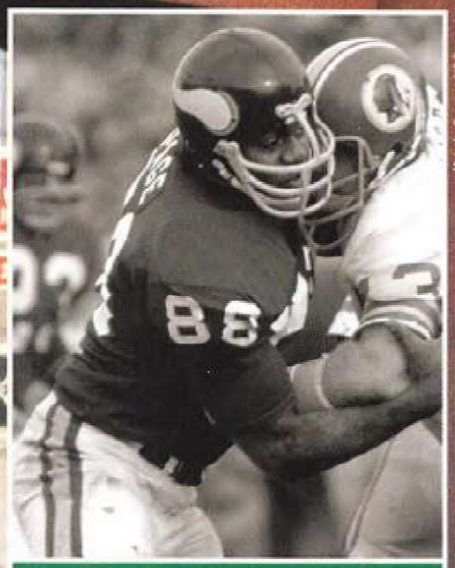


Malcolm Emmons/USA Presswire

Alan Page's Hall of Fame career included four trips to the Super Bowl with the Vikings. He's now an associate justice on Minnesota's Supreme Court.

Leaders Across Two Fields

by Neil Amdur

The language and code words are often similar—leadership, discipline, focus, a game plan, the ability to deal with pressure and shifts in momentum, and ultimately, winning.

Football and politics have been inextricably interwoven in the fabric of American life for generations. And as society continues its search for new leaders who can speak and execute with authority and integrity, former NFL players are moving in increasing numbers from one playing field to the equally challenging arena of politics and public service. As part of that transition, Election Day becomes their new Super Bowl—a season-long buildup that culminates with a winner-take-all showdown.

"The keys to success, no matter what you're doing, are hard work, discipline, the ability to focus on a problem, deal with that problem, and not get sidetracked," says Alan Page, a Hall of Fame defensive lineman who starred for the Vikings and Bears from 1967 until 1981 and is now an associate justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court. "As an athlete, those qualities get tested on a rather frequent and regular basis."

Last fall, at least three retired NFL players were bidding for major public office. Hall of Famer Lynn Swann—winner of four Super Bowls as a receiver for the 1970s Pittsburgh Steelers—ran for governor of Pennsylvania. Tim Baylor, a defensive back with the Colts and Vikings in the 1970s, was a candidate for lieutenant governor in Minnesota, while quarterback Heath Shuler returned to his North Carolina home and won in his bid for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Watching these political match-ups with as much interest as a Sunday afternoon football contest were a number of gridders who themselves had made such a transition, among them: former U.S. Congressman from Oklahoma and Pro Football Hall of Fame wide receiver Steve Largent; former U.S. Congressman, Vice-Presidential nominee, and AFL All-Pro quarterback Jack Kemp; and tight end Russ Francis, who ran for Congress from the state of Hawaii in 2000. Another member of that transitional team, J.C. Watts, preceded his career as a four-term U.S. congressman from Oklahoma with MVP performances in the Orange Bowl as a quarterback for the University of Oklahoma and later in the CFL's version of the Super Bowl, the Grey Cup, playing for the Ottawa Rough Riders.

"Instead of reading defenses," says Shuler, who played four seasons in Washington and New Orleans before embarking on a career in real estate and politics, "you're reading people's body languages [and understanding] what's important to them. The confidence you had in your offensive line is the same you have to instill in voters."

Football's extended leaders have ranged from U.S. presidents to justices on the U.S. Supreme Court. Dwight Eisenhower lettered in football at Army in 1912. Gerald Ford was an All-American center for the University of Michigan and an assistant coach at Yale who turned down offers to play for the Packers and the Bears. Byron "Whizzer" White was one of college football's top backs at the University of Colorado, twice captured the NFL rushing title while playing for Pittsburgh and Detroit, and became an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court at age 44. Current Chief Justice John Roberts attributes much of his leadership acumen to lessons learned in football.

POLITICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE HAVE LONG BEEN A NATURAL DRAW FOR FORMER NFL PLAYERS.

Joe Crocetta/AP WWP

Manny Rubio/WireImage.com

Years before running for governor of Pennsylvania, Lynn Swann was part of the Steelers' amazing run to four Super Bowl titles in six seasons.

Where baseball, basketball, and hockey play in almost daily seasonal rhythms, the buildup to the weekly football game, the playoffs, and finally, the Super Bowl, mirrors political preparations. The home page on Swann's gubernatorial web site was filled with football references that applied to his candidacy, including "About Our Team" and "The Two-Minute Drill." The campaign motto was "Winning Starts Here."

Lynn Swann was keenly familiar with success before entering politics. As a first-round draft choice of the Steelers in 1974, he led the NFL in punt returns as a rookie and caught the game-winning touchdown pass in the AFC Championship Game against Oakland. During the Steelers' run to four Super Bowl titles in six years, Swann was named All-Pro three times and earned MVP honors in Super Bowl X when he had four receptions, including a 64-yard TD, in a 21-17 win over the Cowboys.

"It's become commonplace for companies to refer to the nomenclature of football because it's synonymous with competition and urgency," said Swann during an interview while campaigning last fall. "You have preparation, training, homework, and a game plan. It gives you a little bit of everything you see in the other world."

Swann saw the difference between the regular season and playoffs. And the Super Bowl created an even greater "sense of urgency."

Mark Brettingen/WireImage.com

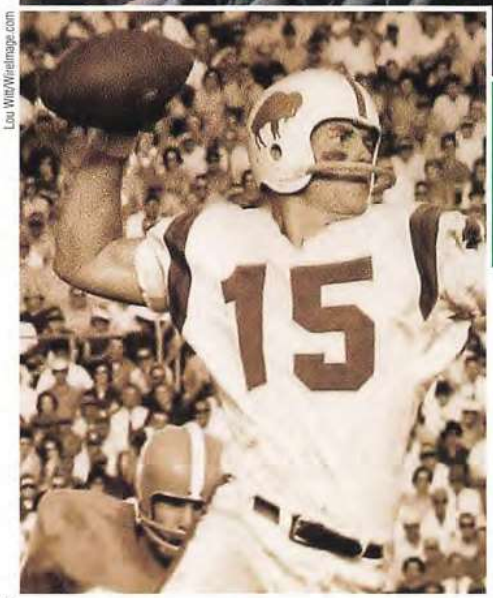
During the regular season, you don't have to be perfect, he said. "[But] in the playoffs, it's a different process and mindset. You have to adjust your attitude. There is that same sense of urgency in politics—one campaign, one election. You only take the field one time, and the process all leads to the Super Bowl, or Election Day."

Jack Kemp took the field for numerous championship games and election days. As an AFL All-Star for six years, he won two league titles for the Bills before ending his career in 1969. He went on to represent the Buffalo region in Congress for 18 years, served as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and was Bob Dole's choice as running mate in the 1996 presidential election. Leadership on the football field and in the locker room correlates to leadership in other fields, he says, citing accountability, responsibility for your actions, motivating others, and the expression of optimism as part of the winning process.

"The 'big game' applies to football and politics," says Kemp, who threw for 114 TDs in his career and ran for another 40. "Taking a team from a competitive position to a championship is a reflection of tenacity, goal-setting, and a never-giving-in attitude. The ultimate manifestation of your success is the championship."

Russ Francis experienced this sensation as a member of the 49ers during the 1984 season. San Francisco won its first six games that year, but often relied on comebacks to keep the streak going. The team was then knocked off its perch, falling to the defensive-minded Steelers, 20-17. That proved to be the last slip-up they would have.

Joe Marquette/AP WWP



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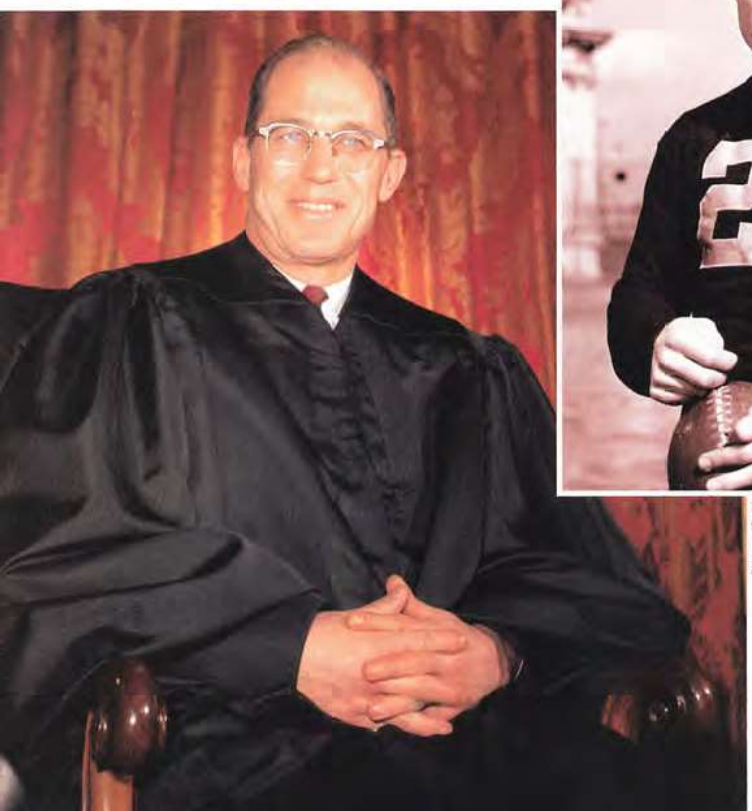


Bettmann/Corbis

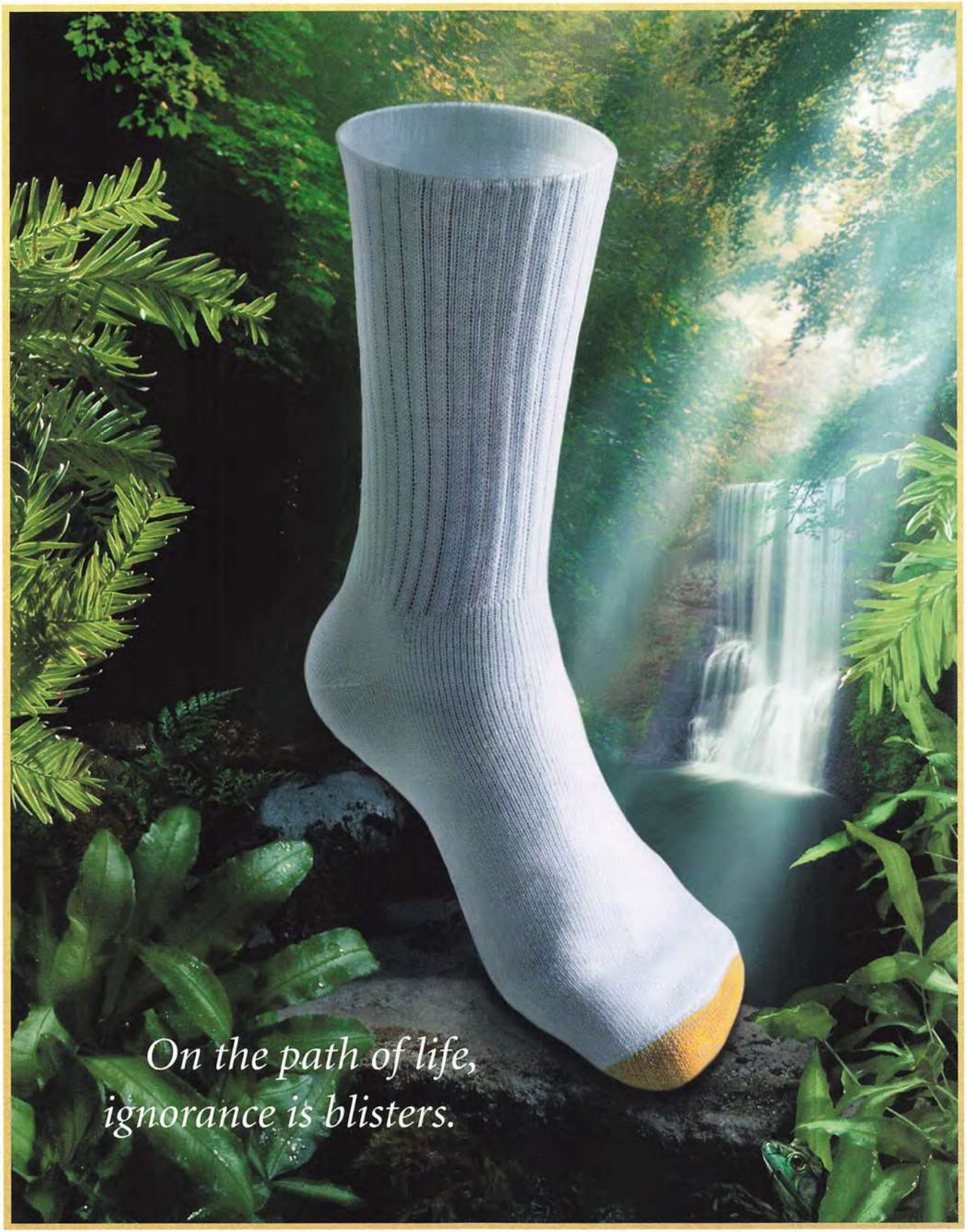
(Above/Left) **Jack Kemp, flanked by Newt Gingrich and Bob Dole, speaks at a 1995 press conference. Kemp was part of two AFL title teams in Buffalo.** (Below) **Byron "Whizzer" White was a two-time NFL rushing champion before becoming a U.S. Supreme Court justice at the age of 44.**

"The bond and camaraderie and pushing each other to get better each week gave us confidence—some would say cockiness," Francis recalls. In their last nine games, the 49ers won by an average of 21 points per game, finished 15-1, and set an NFL record for regular-season victories. They carried that momentum through the postseason, beating the New York Giants and blanking the Chicago Bears to set up a Super Bowl XIX showdown against the Dolphins.

"We had was this unmistakable resolve of a champion," says Francis, even after Miami scored first and led, 10-7, at the end of the opening quarter. "Something like 90 percent of the teams that scored first had won previous Super Bowls. But on the sideline, we still believed that we were 'gonna take these guys apart.'"

They did. Joe Montana completed 24 of 35 passes for three TDs—Francis caught five of his throws—as the 49ers soared past the Dolphins, 38-16.

Francis retired after the 1988 season, worked in the governor's office in Hawaii for several years, and became inspired to reach "the conscious mind of voters to something they think is true." In 2000, he ran against the state's most popular politician, Patsy Mink, for a Congressional seat. Speaking with Largent, Kemp, Watts, and others before and during his campaign, Francis ran stronger than anyone had predicted and, though he lost, says he learned much from the experience.



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Heath Shuler, who quarterbacked the Redskins and Saints, entered the realm of politics last fall when he won a U.S. congressional seat in North Carolina.

"In football, you're measured solely on what you do and how you perform whether in practice or a game," says Francis, who caught 40 touchdown passes during his career. "Everyone plays hard and fair, but there are rules; in politics, a great deal of measuring what you say and stand for can be left to innuendo.

"Still, you can't be a winner in either football or politics unless you perform and complete tasks week after week," Francis says.

Heath Shuler was a first-round selection of the Redskins in 1994, but his playing career was cut short by injuries. After discussing a political run with his family ("There was a lot of thought and prayer," he reveals), Shuler had to survive a primary election before taking on and beating eight-term incumbent Charles Taylor.

"Any success you have," he says, "whether it's in football, business, or politics, you have to have vision, a game plan, and see it through."

Alan Page was a six-time All-Pro as part of the Vikings' celebrated "Purple People Eaters" defense and in 1971 became the first defender to win the league's Most Valuable Player award. In his 15-year career, Page never missed a game and he retired with startling stats: 23 fumble recoveries, 28 blocked kicks, and 173 sacks. He chose law and public service over politics, he says, because of its problem-solving ethos.

Of his numerous playoff games and four Super Bowl appearances, Page now assesses, "My approach was to focus on the event at hand and working through it." What began more as an emotional exercise early in his career progressed to the point where big games became "intellectually challenging."

"When you're on the field, there is no time to think about what you're doing," he explains. "If I had to think about it, the plays would have been over."

Tim Baylor's football career ended in 1979. He has since gone on to launch his own company, run two McDonald's franchises, and involve himself in a range of community organizations that earned him the 2005 Business and Philanthropy Award from the National Center for Black Philanthropy. He consulted with Page and others before agreeing to become Becky Lourey's running mate in the Minnesota governor's race.

"At every level of football, there is a basic element of desire and team commitment that must be displayed," he wrote in response to a question about the connection between the sport and politics.

"Often times, the best athlete does not make the final cut due to things other than ability. A player who is motivated, or is more of a team player, can be better for the goals and objectives of the team, sometimes more than a superior athlete.

"I see that parallel in politics. Often it is not the more experienced politician, or the one with the larger campaign war chest, who earns the right to represent the people. Given a level playing field, the genuine qualities of leadership, motivation, compassion, and team spirit can elevate the average citizen to be chosen by the people."

Baylor's decision to enter politics drew interesting responses from former teammates. "Most of the guys applaud the courage, or question the sanity of such a decision," he noted wryly. "However, everyone understands the competitive desire and effort it takes to realize dreams or to actualize visions. They have been there in their respective football positions. Pro football is a business and politics is an integral part of that business. They understand."

The ability to become involved and make a difference were major factors in the decisions by Shuler, Swann, and Baylor, even as Page initially warned Baylor to "be ready for the attack."

Baylor treated the primary as if it were training camp, he said. He equated poll numbers with the same skepticism that football players use when they hear fans, media, and odds makers proclaim, "You guys don't have a chance to win."

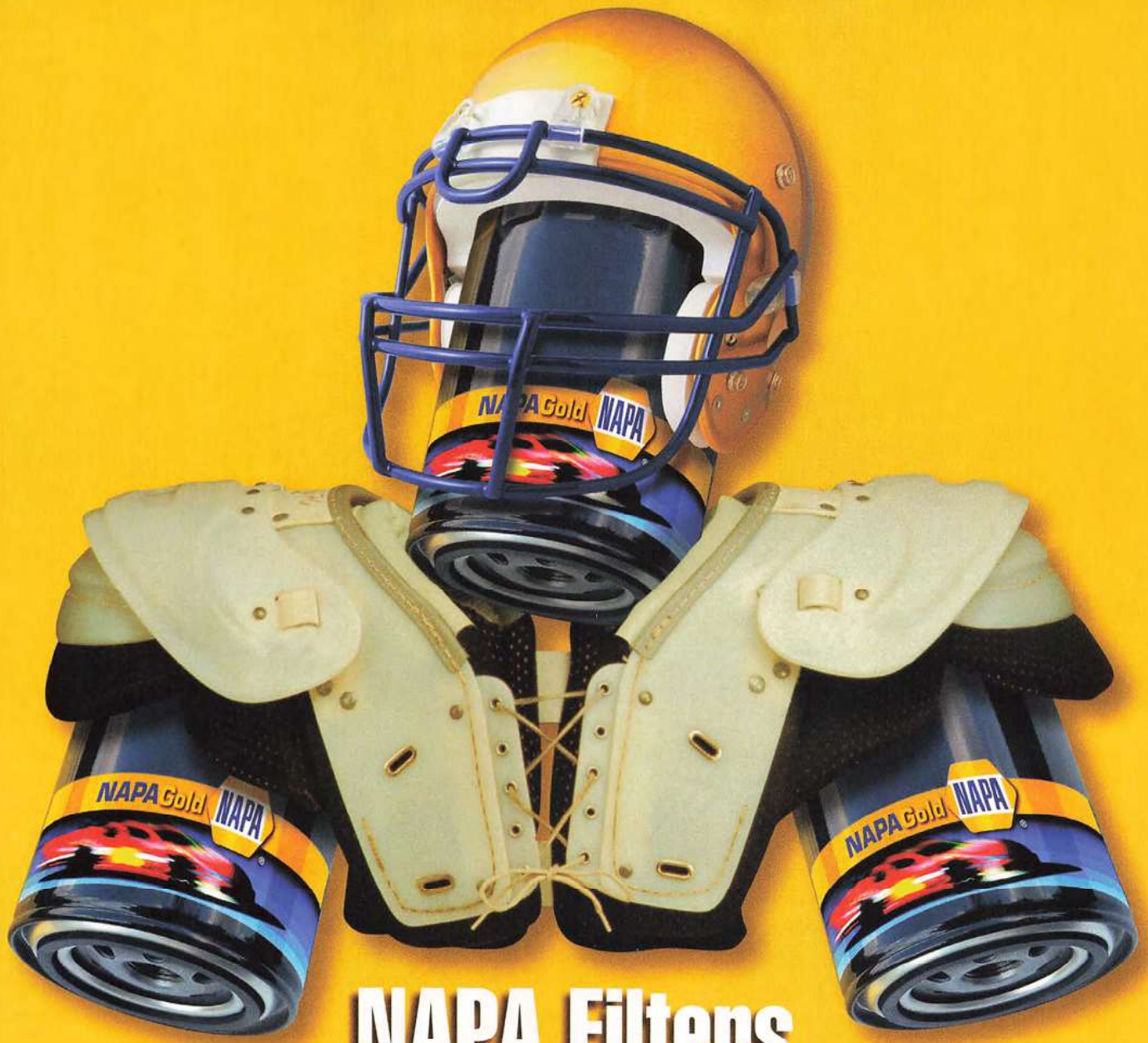
"Every professional and college athlete has played in a game where everybody thought they didn't have a chance to win," he says.

As former neighbors in Minnesota, Page and Baylor share another interest besides football and politics—running. In 1979, Page became the first NFL player to finish a marathon; he then challenged Baylor to do the same. "I accepted his challenge conditional on him running for a judicial position," Baylor recalls.

Baylor occasionally pushes his jogging partner to run for another office—United States Senator—and believes Page could win easily if he declared his candidacy.

Page insists his priorities are defined by more simplistic daily rituals. "My goal," he says, speaking to his love for the non-political version of running, "is to still be doing it on the day I leave this earth."

Neil Amdur is president of Amdur Productions and also the editor-in-chief at Tennis Week. *He spent 12 years as sports editor of* The New York Times.



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THE NEXT LEVEL

by Michael MacCambridge

PRO FOOTBALL FOUND ITS PLACE IN AMERICA'S SPORTING CONSCIOUSNESS 50 YEARS AGO WHEN THE GIANTS AND BEARS PLAYED FOR THE NFL CHAMPIONSHIP.

It remains one of the most enduring myths in pro football: the sport arrived like a thunderbolt on December 28, 1958, when the Baltimore Colts beat the New York Giants, 23-17, in the epic NFL Championship Game, setting the stage for its ascent in the 1960s to becoming America's favorite spectator sport.

But those who lived through those heady times tell a different story. It wasn't like the nation discovered the sport overnight after "The Greatest Game Ever Played." In fact, the league had been enjoying a long, steady climb in popularity, with attendance at NFL games increasing every year in the '50s. And in New York, where the Giants were moving to a place of primacy on the crowded sporting stage, the moment when they hit the big time wasn't 1958 but two years earlier, during their 1956 title season, when they played their home games at Yankee Stadium for the first time.

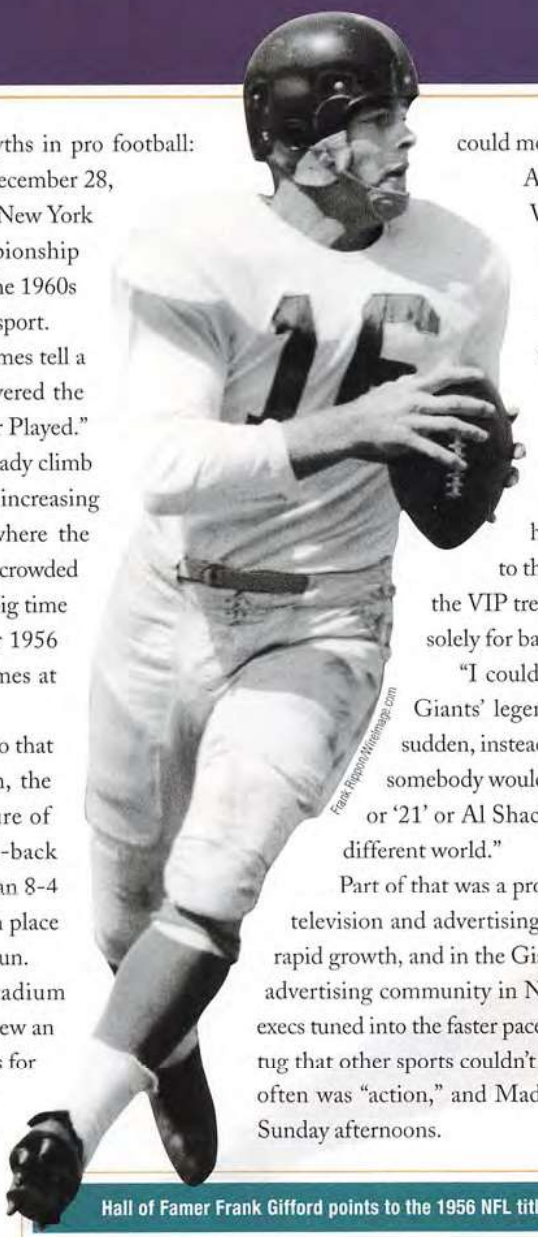
A confluence of events brought the Giants to that special place and time. After the 1954 season, the team ended the 23-year head coaching tenure of Steve Owen and replaced him with the laid-back Arkansan Jim Lee Howell, who presided over an 8-4 turnaround in 1955 while putting the pieces in place for what would turn out to be a championship run.

The team's mere presence in Yankee Stadium meant a lot as well. In 1955, after the Giants drew an announced crowd of 7,000 to the Polo Grounds for a game against the Chicago Cardinals, owner Tim Mara received a call from NFL Commissioner Bert Bell, informing him that two unnamed Texas oilmen were willing to pay $1 million for the Giants, but only if they could move the team's games to Yankee Stadium. After talking with his sons, Jack and Wellington, the elder Mara concluded that if someone was willing to pay that amount of money to put the team into Yankee Stadium, they should look into it themselves. Early in 1956, the Giants signed a contract to play their games across the Harlem River, in the Bronx.

The team's profile changed almost instantly. Football players who for years had been ignored or made to feel inferior to their baseball counterparts started receiving the VIP treatment that had in the past been reserved solely for baseball stars.

"I could tell a difference even then," recalls the Giants' legendary halfback Frank Gifford. "All of a sudden, instead of going to the dumps on the West Side, somebody would be inviting you to dinner at Toots Shor's or '21' or Al Shack's or Rose's or Manuche's. It was just a different world."

Part of that was a product of the other forces at play. Both the television and advertising industries were experiencing periods of rapid growth, and in the Giants they found a desirable outlet. For the advertising community in New York—brimming with young, active execs tuned into the faster pace of the new media—football had a visceral tug that other sports couldn't match. The word they spoke about most often was "action," and Madison Avenue's interest extended beyond Sunday afternoons.



Hall of Famer Frank Gifford points to the 1956 NFL title game as a breakthrough for pro football.

Robert Riger/Getty Images

Don Chandler punts to the Bears during the Giants' win in the 1956 NFL Championship Game, played at Yankee Stadium.

Charlie Conerly, the Giants' quarterback, became friendly with longtime season-ticket holder Jack Landry, an executive with Philip Morris who provided Conerly with an endorsement deal for Marlboro cigarettes. Gifford landed a pregame television show, a news broadcasting spot, and the first in a long line of endorsement deals, for the Jantzen sportswear company.

But none of that would have mattered if the team wasn't special, and by 1956 the Giants were becoming a force in the league, particularly on their home field where they had developed a loyal following. The large, loud crowds that came to cheer the team at Yankee Stadium were avid and knowledgeable. They cheered not only for the Giants' offensive backfield stars, but vocalized their support by yelling "DEE-FENSE! DEE-FENSE!" during important defensive stands, or repeatedly chanting the last name of rookie linebacker Sam Huff and veteran defensive end Andy Robustelli.

AP WWF

Obtained from the Rams in 1956, defensive end Andy Robustelli quickly became a favorite of Giants fans.

Howell was a delegator and turned over much strategic authority to his two chief assistants, Vince Lombardi and Tom Landry. It was a brilliant move in hindsight, though not everyone was convinced at the time. After visiting Howell at work, columnist Red Smith wrote, "Mostly he is the administrator and the coordinator, and that apparently is the way to do the job today. If the question is offense, Howell says, 'Ask Lombardi about that.' Defense? Tom Landry is the man to see. U.S. Steel does fairly well on that plan, but it is unorthodox in football and therefore suspect by some."

In 1956, the wisdom of Howell's methods would be proved out. The Giants opened with three games on the road to avoid a conflict with the Yankees, who were in the World Series. After splitting their first two contests, they beat the Cleveland Browns to start a five-game winning streak. They eased their way to the Eastern Division title with an 8-3-1 record, the tie coming against the Chicago Bears in a 17-17 thriller in late November.

The Giants were a tightly knit team, at least among the units themselves, which maintained a healthy rivalry with one another.

As Gifford remembers it, "We didn't like [the defense] very much, and they didn't like us much. And [we] didn't really care. We were cliquey."

The antagonism reflected some of the competitiveness between Lombardi and Landry and was felt most acutely when the offense was sputtering. Huff, marching off the field after another of the Giants' many defensive stands, was known to mutter to his offensive counterparts, "Now get in there and hold 'em."

Another factor for the bond among the units was simple proximity. Many of the players lived in the residential apartments at the stately Hotel Concourse Plaza ("The business and social center of the Bronx"), just up 161st Street from Yankee Stadium. There, Huff would often receive late-night calls from Landry, inviting him down to his room to look at more game film. Or Gifford and Conerly would be visited by Lombardi, who spoke to the offensive stars about what plays they thought would work best in the upcoming game.

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WE **GUARANTEE** YOU WILL WIN!

Lombardi and Landry weren't legends yet, just a pair of bright, competitive, ambitious coaches who were reshaping the game. The Catholic Lombardi was voluble and fiery, a man of vast charm but also prone to profane tirades whom Landry referred to as "Mr. High-Low" for his mood swings. Landry, a self-proclaimed born-again Christian who'd flown bomber missions in World War II, was detached and self-collected, an industrial engineer who loved the solitude of extended study sessions. With 15 days to prepare for the title showdown against the Western Division champion Bears, the two assistants made the most of it.

On December 30, in 20-degree weather in front of a crowd of 56,836, the Giants hosted Chicago in the NFL Championship Game. Broadcast nationally by NBC but blacked out in New York City, the game brought the league a record broadcast fee of $205,000, foretelling the riches to be earned from TV just a few years down the line. The Giants hadn't won the crown in 18 seasons, and hadn't even played for the title in 10 years, since they lost to the Bears at the Polo Grounds in 1946.

Chicago, in the first of two years under the guidance of coach Paddy Driscoll (George Halas would return to the Bears sideline in 1958), had gone 9-2-1 and owned the league's top-scoring offense, averaging better than 30 points per game. They entered the game as a slight favorite, but the Giants were a confident bunch in the Yankee Stadium locker room.

An hour before the game, a tense Howell bridled at his loose team, complaining they were displaying "too much levity." The game itself would prove his fears misplaced. "I always thought players should be pretty quiet and alone before the big game," reasoned Howell. "At least that's the way we were when I played."

But this was a new breed of player, and for All-Pros like Gifford and Robustelli there was little need for false modesty or feigned nervousness. Even the team's front office was confident. After the brilliant-but-absent-minded Bears assistant Clark Shaughnessy walked into the Giants locker room by mistake, Tim Mara said, "I'd have invited him to join us, but I figure that the Bears will need all the help they can get. We'll murder them."

And so they did. The Giants' Gene Filipski ran the opening kickoff back from his own 8 to the Bears 39. On third-and-eight from the 37, quarterback Don Heinrich found Gifford for a 20-yard gain. On the next play, fullback Mel Triplett ran 17 yards for a TD. By halftime, the Giants were ahead 34-7, and the celebration in New York had begun. The 47-7 final was an accurate reflection of the Giants' dominance.

Lombardi and Landry weren't legends yet, just a pair of bright, competitive, ambitious coaches who were reshaping the game.

Robert Riger/Getty Images

Prior to becoming head coach of the Cowboys, Tom Landry drew up innovative defensive game plans for the New York Giants in the 1950s.

The triumph was a monument to the brilliance of Howell's two lead assistants. Lombardi had taken game strategy to another level. First-string quarterback Conerly often sat out the opening quarter while backup Heinrich went behind center for the first few series, leaving Conerly and Lombardi to discuss the defense's approach to the game. They received help from Wellington Mara, who from the press box would take Polaroid photographs, then pass them down in a weighted sock, attached to a piece of string, to the Giants bench, allowing them to examine the defensive alignments they were facing. Lombardi had correctly predicted the Bears would key on the Giants' ends, the result being New York repeatedly earning big yardage with passes to its backs.

The defense was, if anything, even more impressive. Landry had veered away from the five-man front that was traditional in the day and created the modern alignment called the 4-3 defense, which essentially dropped the middle guard back into the role of a linebacker. The middle linebacker needed to be both physical and mobile, and in Huff (who was among an astounding 15 participants in the game to reach the Pro Football Hall of Fame), Landry found a textbook example for the new position. Well-scouted and unable to break through the Giants' defensive front, the Bears became a picture of frustration.

"Those linebackers were terrific," said Bears end Harlon Hill after the game. "No matter which way I turned, there was a linebacker on me. They were better than us. That's all."

At the end of the game, Giants fans stormed onto the field and tore down the goal posts, behavior that had previously been associated only with devoutly loyal college fans. But something special was going on in the Bronx, not just for the Giants but the game as a whole. It would be a while before pro football was seen as a viable rival to Major League Baseball, but in New York at least, it was clearly becoming a big deal.

"I always believe that that game and how it opened everyone's eyes to the excitement of pro football was the key to the development of the NFL today, more so than the '58 title game that gets more attention," says Gifford. "People forget what the NFL was like in those days. It was not America's No. 1 sport. The game wasn't even a sellout. But once we played the game, we became heroes in New York. The thing just grew from there."

Among his many works, Michael MacCambridge is the author of America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured A Nation *and the editor of* The ESPN College Football Encyclopedia.

SUDDEN IMPACT

BIG SPECIAL TEAMS PLAYS CAN INSTANTLY SWING THE MOMENTUM OF A SUPER BOWL.

by Ray Didinger

Desmond Howard was not overwhelmed by the big stage. He wasn't blinded by the bright lights, either. He had been there before. He won the Heisman Trophy in 1991, which is as good as it gets in college football. He did all the talk shows and smiled for the cameras. He once even struck the Heisman pose in the end zone, delighting the masses at the University of Michigan.

Howard was a showman, so it was probably inevitable he would wind up in the biggest show of all, the Super Bowl, and once he was there, he would find the spotlight. It took awhile—five years to be exact—and his ego was slightly bruised along the way, but when he finally made it to Super Bowl XXXI with the Green Bay Packers, he was ready for his close-up.

The Packers possessed an array of superstars, but it was Howard, a kick returner, who walked away with the Rozelle Trophy as the game's Most Valuable Player following the 35-21 win over New England. He stands as the only special teamer to earn MVP honors in the 40-year history of the game. Even though quarterback Brett Favre accounted for three Green Bay touchdowns (two passing, one rushing) and defensive end Reggie White set a Super Bowl record with three sacks, everyone agreed that Howard was the key to the victory.

He set up 10 first half points with punt returns of 32 and 34 yards. Then, after the Patriots rallied within 27-21 in the third quarter, Howard broke their hearts with a 99-yard kickoff return, the longest in Super Bowl history, to put the game away. He finished with 244 combined return yards, setting another Super Bowl standard.

"We had a lot of momentum and our defense was playing better," said New England head coach Bill Parcells in the postgame press conference. "But [Howard] made the big play. That return was the game right there. He's been great all year and he was great again today."

"It is a wonderful feeling," Howard said afterward, "because I didn't just ride on someone else's coattails to get my Super Bowl ring. I wasn't some guy on the bench who just happened to be in the right place at the right time. I was a contributor, a major contributor. That's what people will remember and that's what my teammates will remember. That means everything to me."

So it was Howard who did the post-Super Bowl victory tour to Disney World and *The David Letterman Show*. One of these days perhaps another special teams player will have the same opportunity. But award or no award, special teams will continue to have a major impact on pro football's biggest game.

Richard Carson/Reuters/Corbis

Adam Vinatieri's Super Bowl heroics are well-documented. He won two titles for the Patriots with last-second kicks, including this field goal that beat Carolina in Super Bowl XXXVIII.

Sometimes their contributions are obvious, as it was with New England's Adam Vinatieri, who kicked game-winning field goals in two Super Bowls, or Baltimore's Jim O'Brien, who won Super Bowl V with a 32-yard field goal in the closing seconds. Other times they are subtle, as was the case last year when Pittsburgh's Chris Gardocki won his punting duel with Seattle's Tom Rouen. Rouen had four opportunities to pin the Steelers deep in their own territory, yet each time kicked the ball into the end zone for a touchback. Gardocki had a 54-yard punt that rolled dead at the 2-yard line, a shift in field position that helped the Steelers extend a 14-10 lead into a 21-10 victory.

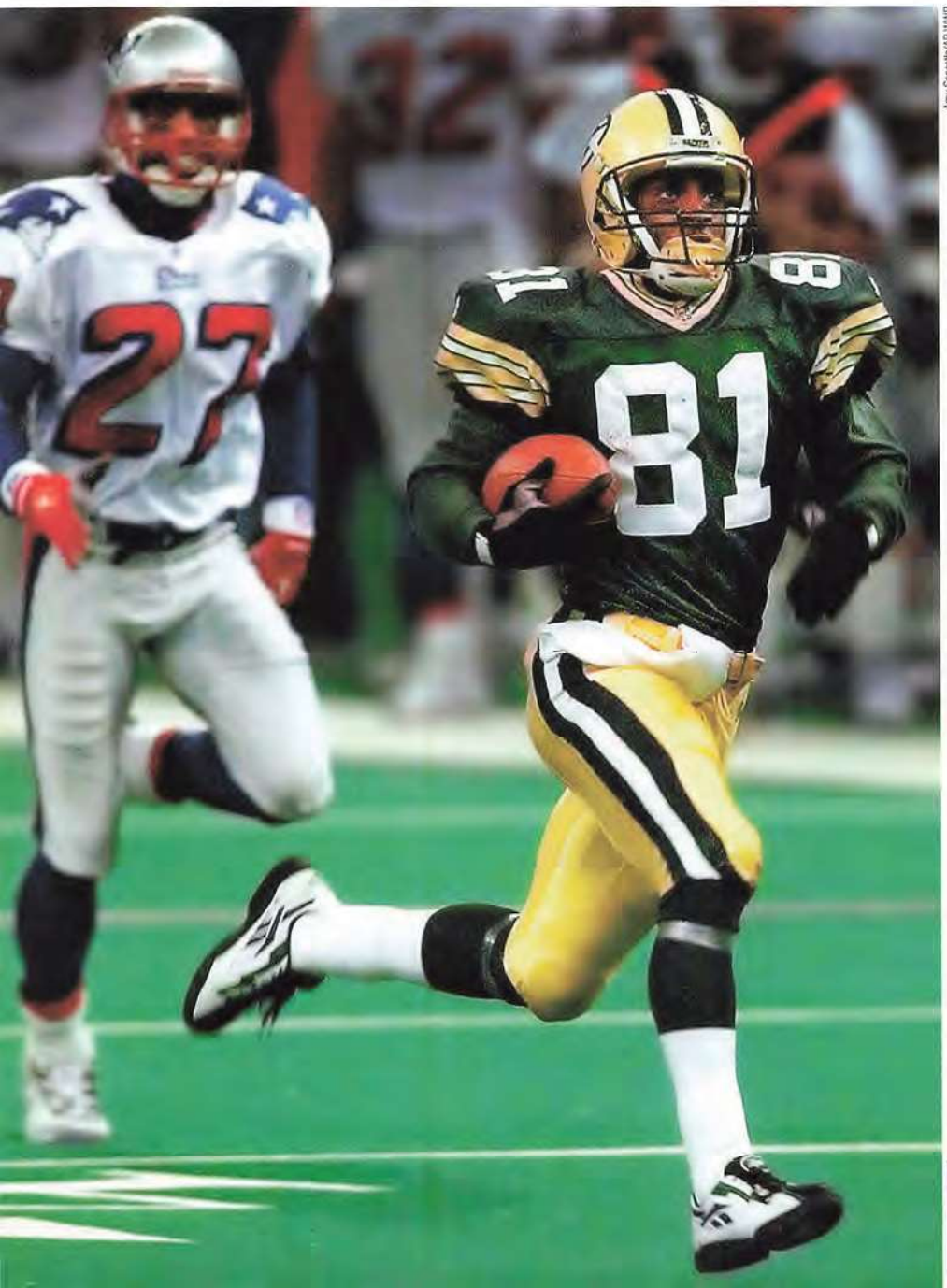
"There are no 'little' plays in a Super Bowl," says Len Dawson, the Hall of Fame quarterback who led Kansas City to a 23-7 victory over Minnesota in Super Bowl IV. "Every change of possession, every yard gained or lost is significant. Our kicking game is what decided that Super Bowl. I was named the MVP, but I've always said it should have gone to [placekicker] Jan Stenerud."

Stenerud accounted for the game's first nine points by kicking field goals of 48, 32, and 25 yards. The first kick set the tone, insists Dawson. "They [the Vikings] expected us to punt. They couldn't believe it when Jan came on the field. When he made the kick, they were in shock. They never had to contend with that kind of [weapon] before."

Once you factor in the punting game—Kansas City's Jerrel Wilson averaged a booming 48.5 yards per punt while Minnesota's Bob Lee managed just a 37-yard average on his kicks—it becomes clear why the Vikings spent the entire afternoon playing uphill.

Super Bowl history also has its share of special teams misfires. There was Garo Yepremian's slapstick fumble following a blocked field goal attempt late in Super Bowl VII. Washington's Mike Bass returned it for a touchdown, cutting Miami's lead to 14-7 and putting the Dolphins' bid for a perfect season in jeopardy. Safety Jake Scott told Garo, "If we lose this game, I'll kill you." Thankfully, it never came to that. Miami held on to win its first Super Bowl title.

More haunting was Scott Norwood's missed field goal attempt in the final seconds of Super Bowl XXV. The 47-yard kick, which sailed wide right, allowed the New York Giants to escape with a 20-19 win over Buffalo, the first of four consecutive Super Bowl losses for the Bills. Some 16 years later, people still remember. Mention the name Scott Norwood and watch them shake their heads. "Poor guy," they say. "Imagine how he must've felt."



Amy Sancetta/AP WWP

Sometimes the crippling mistake and the heroic moment come back-to-back as they did in Super Bowl XXXVIII. Carolina rallied to tie New England, 29-29, with 1:08 remaining in regulation, but the Panthers' John Kasay hooked the ensuing kickoff out of bounds. That costly error allowed the Patriots to take possession at the 40-yard line, and in just six plays QB Tom Brady had moved his team into field goal range. Vinatieri kicked the 41-yarder to win the game.

"As a kicker, you dream about being in that situation," says Vinatieri, who also drilled a game-winning 48-yard field goal to stun St. Louis, 20-17, in Super Bowl XXXVI. "I must have kicked that kick a thousand times in my sleep. You tell yourself, 'Just take your time. Hit it straight. Let it go.'

"It is definitely stressful. You just have to control it. People say, 'It's just a game.' It is, but it isn't. I mean, it's the Super Bowl."

The stakes in a Super Bowl are obviously higher, even more so for special teamers. A quarterback handles the ball on every play. Running backs have upwards of 20 touches. A linebacker can miss a tackle but has the next play to make amends. A special teamer is on the field for just a handful of snaps, so he can't afford to make a mistake because it will stand out—even if his team wins the game.

Todd Christensen of the Raiders learned

Desmond Howard heads for the end zone with the longest kickoff return (99 yards) in Super Bowl history, a play that keyed Green Bay's Super Bowl XXXI win.

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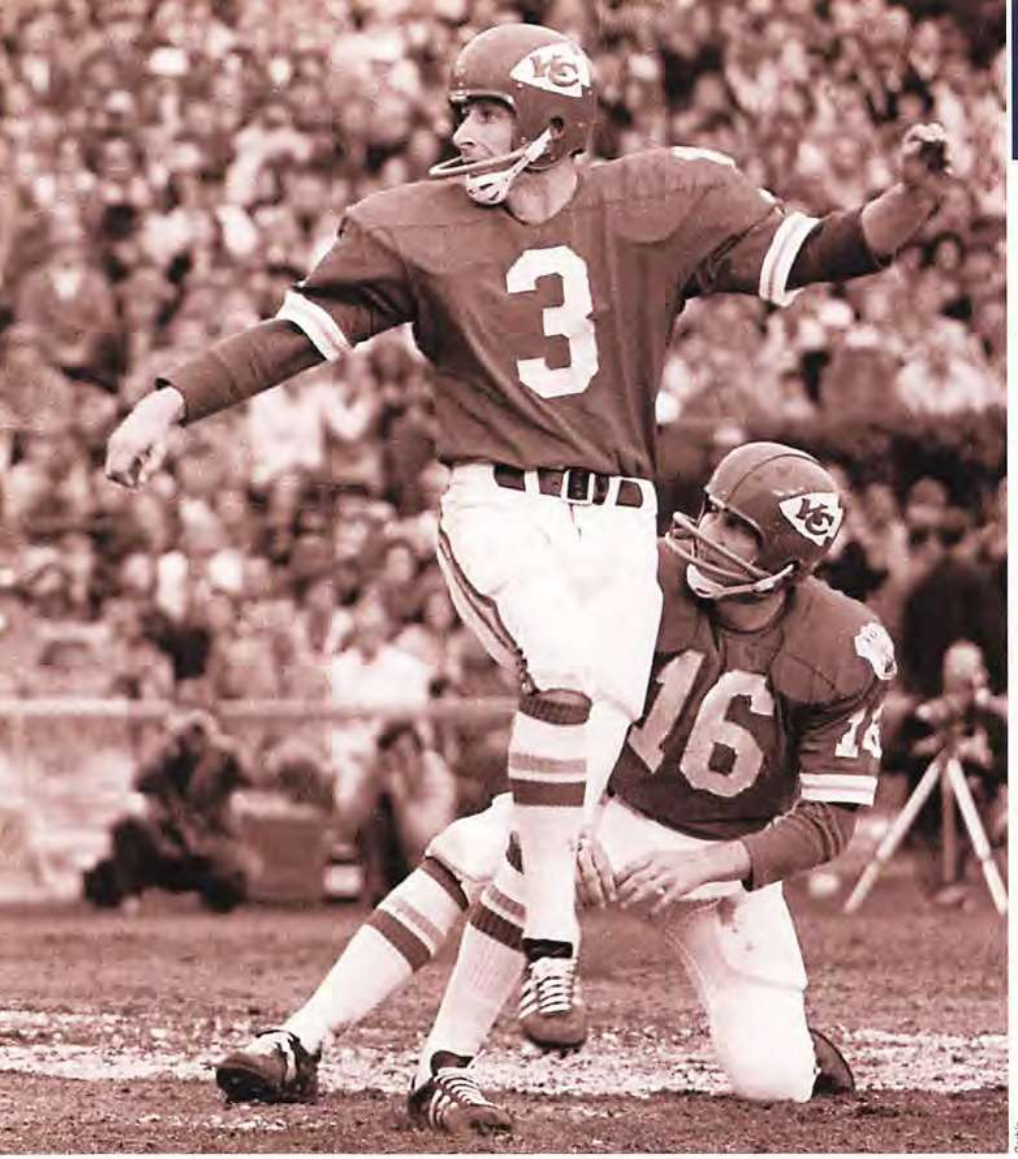

Corbis

Jan Stenerud was Kansas City's secret weapon in Super Bowl IV. The Norwegian-born kicker accounted for his team's first nine points with field goals from 48, 32, and 25 yards in a 23-7 win over Minnesota.

that in Super Bowl XVIII. He was a Pro Bowl tight end who doubled as the team's long snapper. Early on, he unleashed a high snap that a leaping Ray Guy snared with one hand. Guy turned what could have been a huge loss of yardage—and field position—into a booming 42-yard punt with no return.

The Raiders routed Washington, 38-9, but columnist Dick Young still grilled Christensen after the game about the high snap. He felt if the ball had sailed over Guy's head and the Redskins recovered, the game would have turned in their favor.

"I was annoyed," says Christensen, who contributed four receptions in the victory. "There were a million things to talk about, but that [snap]? The final score was 38-9, but he kept insisting. I said, 'Would the game have been different? Yeah, if the Redskins had scored a touchdown there, the final score would have been 38-16.' I thought it was silly to make such a big deal out of it, but it made me realize how special teams plays can be magnified.

"What happened was on the previous play, I caught a pass and hit the ground. At the Super Bowl, they decorate the field and I got some of that chalk on my hands. I didn't have a towel to wipe it off, so I had to stay on and snap for the punt. The ball slipped out of my hands. Luckily for me, Ray was 6-3 and a great athlete. He went up and got it."

Ironically, the Raiders' first score was produced by special teams when reserve tight end Derrick Jensen blocked a Jeff Hayes punt and fell on it in the end zone for a touchdown. "Absolutely enormous play," Christensen recalls. "Five minutes into the game, we're up 7-0. Special teams plays are the X-factor. When we scored there, it was a huge swing in momentum and emotion."

Another example was Super Bowl XXXV. Baltimore jumped to a 17-0 lead before Ron Dixon ran 97 yards with a kickoff return that gave the Giants life...though briefly. On the ensuing kickoff, the Ravens' Jermaine Lewis broke away for an 84-yard touchdown. From there, Baltimore coasted to a 34-7 victory.

"Jay Lew broke their backs," insists linebacker Ray Lewis, whose five tackles and four passes defensed earned him the game's MVP honor. "[The Giants] were still high-fiving [after the Dixon touchdown] when Jay Lew got the ball. Once he hit the open field, I was shouting, 'The rings are on the way.' It was over, it was our game at that point."

Howard's kickoff return in Super Bowl XXXI had a similar effect. The Patriots, 14-point underdogs, had cut the Green Bay lead to six on a Curtis Martin touchdown run. Then Howard took Vinatieri's kickoff and raced to the end zone. That was the ballgame.

Prior to that play, the Patriots had contained Howard, at least on kickoffs. In their film study, they saw the Packers liked the middle return, so they set up their kick coverage to take away the inside lanes. On his first two returns, Howard had managed just 32 yards. His first return in the second half netted 23 yards. He was visibly frustrated, jawing with the Patriots after every tackle.

"They were saying, 'Nothing for you, baby. We're shutting you down,'" Howard recalls. "I told them, 'That's all right. Just keep kicking it to me. Keep rolling the dice. See what happens.' We made big plays all season [on special teams]. I knew we'd do it again. It was just a matter of time."

During the regular season, Howard set an NFL record with 875 punt return yards and led the league with a 15.1 yard average while scoring three times. He also had a 71-yard punt return for a touchdown in Green Bay's NFC Divisional Playoff win over San Francisco.

"With the exception of Brett Favre, Desmond has impacted our team more than any other player," praised Packers head coach Mike Holmgren prior to the Super Bowl.

For Howard, the 1996 season served as vindication following four years of struggles in Washington and Jacksonville that left him written off as a Heisman Trophy bust. The Redskins, who selected him fourth overall in 1992, let him go in the expansion draft and the Jaguars cut him loose after one season. He signed with Green Bay for an almost minimum wage contract of $300,000. When he broke a punt return for a touchdown in a preseason game against Pittsburgh, it rekindled the spark. After that, Howard was nearly unstoppable.

He had two big punt returns in the Super Bowl, but the Patriots

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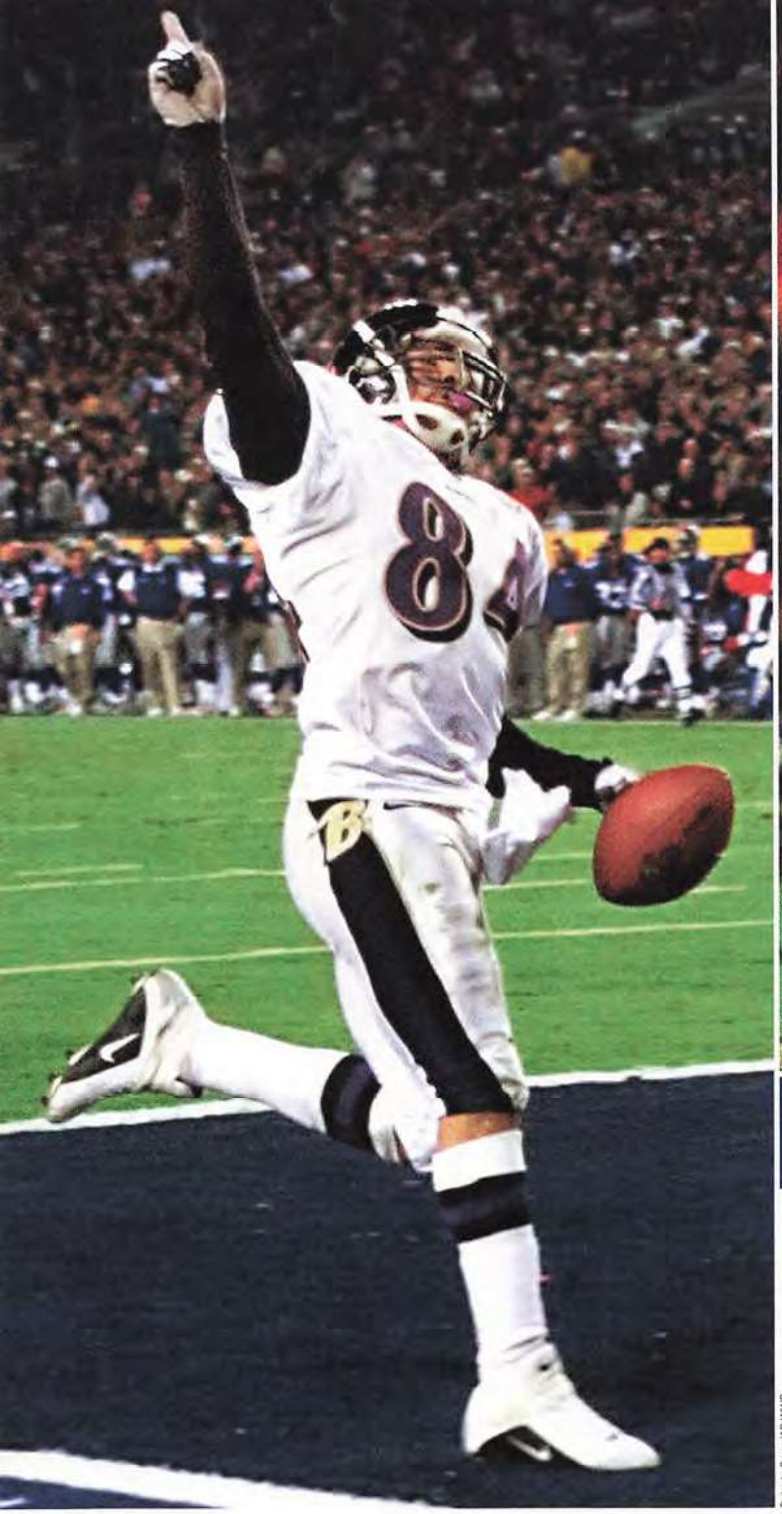

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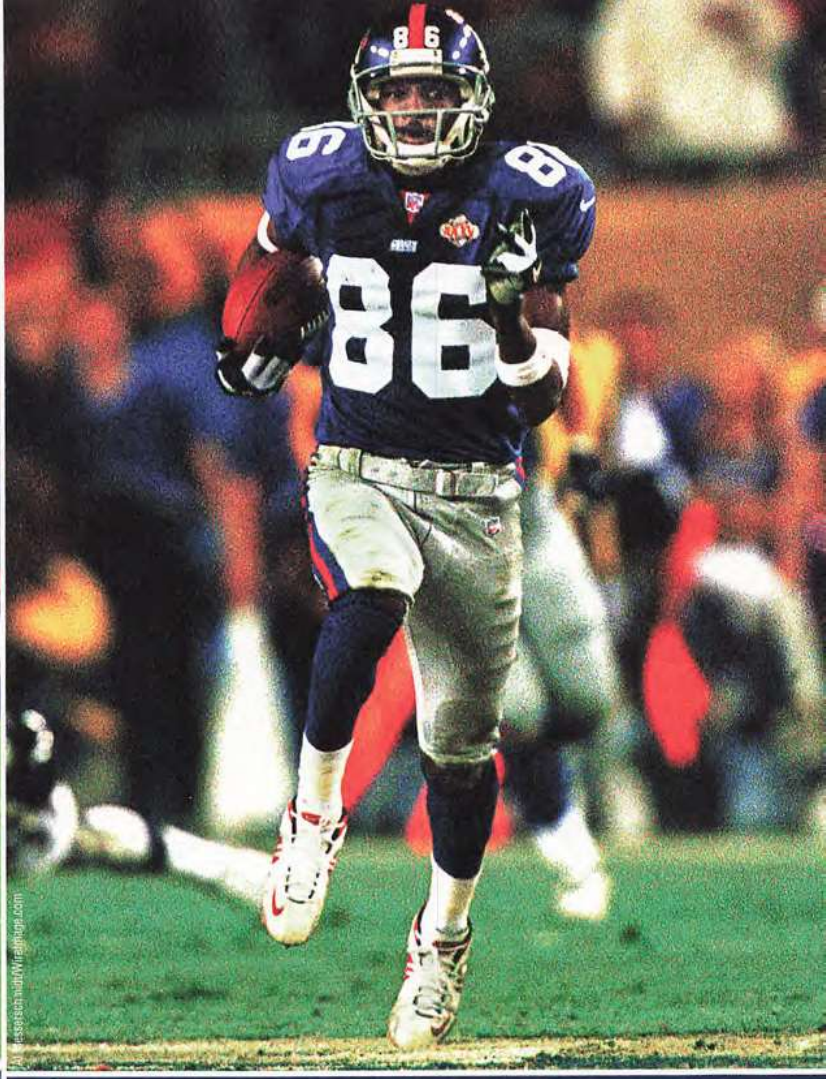

All Jesse Sisch/NFLPhotoImage.com

The Giants appeared to seize the momentum in Super Bowl XXXV when Ron Dixon (above) raced 97 yards for a touchdown on a kickoff return. But the Ravens grabbed it right back on Jermaine Lewis' 84-yard kickoff return for a score.

were being successful in keeping him bottled up on kickoffs. Packers special teams coach Nolan Cromwell tried to beat the New England coverage by sending Howard wide, but after the Martin touchdown he went back to his strength. He called for a middle return and this time Howard found a lane behind the blocks of Travis Jervey, Calvin Jones, Keith McKenzie, and Lamont Hollinquest. Don Beebe made the final block, kicking out Mike McGruder.

The last Patriot standing was Vinatieri and he was no match for the shifty Howard, who raced away for the clinching score and then celebrated with a Michael Jackson robot walk into the end zone. Howard did not realize it at the time, but he became the first player in NFL history to return a kickoff and a punt for touchdowns in the same postseason.

"I was surprised they kept kicking to me," Howard says. "I felt sooner or later we'd break one. They did a good job messing up our timing. They were kicking the ball at different depths. But on the last one, [Vinatieri] hit it nice and deep. As I was backing up, I was thinking, 'Okay, this is gonna give us a chance. We can set up our blocks. All I have to do is find a crease.'

"When I hit the wedge, it was a lot more than a crease, it was a nice, open lane."

After the game, Howard talked about his up-and-down career and the frustrations he overcame on his journey to Green Bay. As it turned out, it would be his final game as a Packer. Two months later, he signed a four-year, $6 million free-agent contract with the Raiders.

"This season hasn't been a resurrection of my career or anything like that," said Howard, who joined Jim Plunkett, Marcus Allen, and Roger Staubach as the only players to win both the Heisman Trophy and the Super Bowl MVP. "Resurrection means something died. Nothing ever died in me. I just needed a chance to prove what I could do."

And it was special teams—occasionally overlooked by fans, but never overvalued by the coaches or the players on the field—that provided the opportunity for him.

Ray Didinger is a senior producer with NFL Films and the author of The Eagles Encyclopedia, *published by Temple University Press. Previously, he was a sportswriter for 27 years, covering pro football for the* Philadelphia Bulletin *and the* Philadelphia Daily News.

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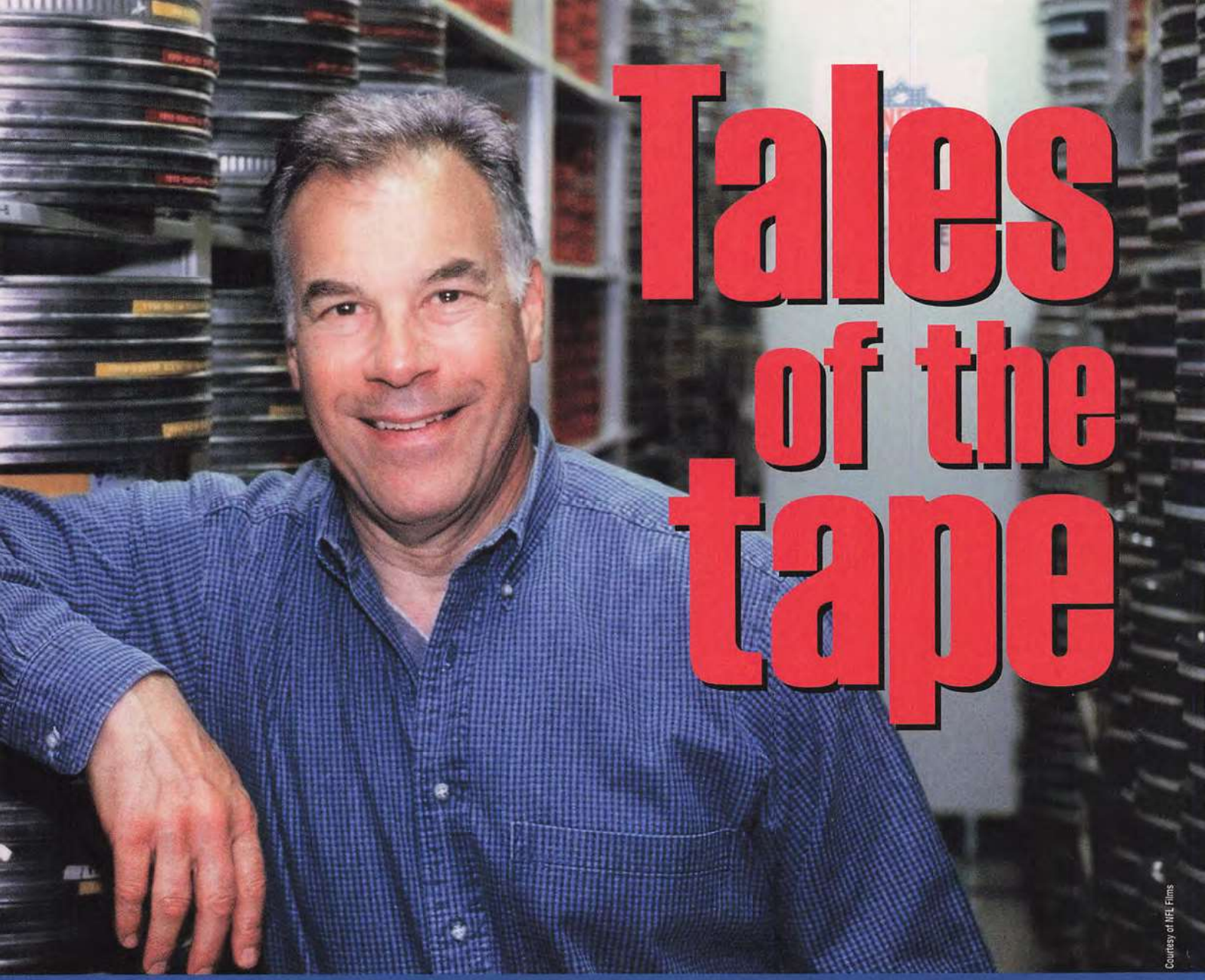


Tales of the tape

Courtesy of NFL Films

Steve Sabol uses NFL Network's America's Game series to take fans inside the Super Bowl like never before.

by Craig Ellenport

America's Game, the landmark series that has been running on NFL Network since November, is the latest project to stir the football passions of NFL Films president Steve Sabol.

As perhaps the preeminent storyteller and mythmaker in all of sports, Sabol's challenge was to create a series celebrating the 40 Super Bowl champions in ways never before seen. Featuring new interviews with prominent figures from each of the winning teams, rare behind-the-scenes footage, and untold stories, *America's Game* adds a new dimension to the legacies forged by these champions.

"This series is really about NFL mythology," says Sabol, 64, who has been part of NFL Films since his father shot the league's 1962 title game between the Packers and Giants. "And mythology—whether it's the labors of Hercules or Jason and the Golden Fleece—it's the same stories told over and over. Yet it's so meaningful and there's such truth to it that it never gets stale. We're dealing here with NFL mythology; we're just telling it in a new way."

As part of the series, NFL Network ranked the top 20 Super Bowl champions of all time. A blue-ribbon panel of experts voted on these teams, with the first 20 episodes of *America's Game* featuring the countdown from No. 20 to No. 1 (with the top two teams airing on CBS on Feb. 3, one day before Super Bowl XLI).

Prior to the launch of *America's Game,* Sabol took time to discuss the project.

CE: How did you settle on the *America's Game* concept?

SS: There were two ways to go with it. One was to celebrate the greatest players, which to me wasn't as appealing as picking the greatest team. The essence of football is teamwork. Of all the popular sports, football is the greatest of all team sports. We thought this should be a series that celebrates the greatest teams, not the individuals.

CE: Tell us about the "blue-ribbon panel" that ranked the top teams.

SS: The initial thought was to create interest in this by opening it to a vote for the greatest team. But I didn't think it should be a fan vote, because a fan votes with his heart, not his head. If this was going to be meaningful, we had to come up with the "Mother of All Panels." It had to be the greatest panel of football experts ever assembled. So I got our producers together and we devised a list of historians, trained observers, beat writers, columnists, statisticians, former players, coaches, general mangers, and scouts. I've never seen a panel with this much knowledge assembled for any sport. If football knowledge and football facts were grains of rice, this panel could feed an army!

CE: The voting was so spirited that you actually made a 41st episode all about the selection process. Which teams stood out the most?

SS: I can break it down by decade…

In the 1960s, you've got Lombardi's Packers, winners of the first two Super Bowls. But most of the panel felt that the greatest Lombardi team was 1962, and they weren't eligible. The '66 Packers, though, did make the top 20. Then the discussion shifted to the Jets—a team that was better than people thought.

But if the Jets' victory in Super Bowl III made the Super Bowl "theater for the masses," it didn't sell everyone on the idea that the AFL was serious competition for the NFL. The Chiefs were still a heavy underdog in the next Super Bowl, a 14-point underdog to the NFL's Vikings. But they pounded the Vikings, and in many voters' minds they were a strong contender in the top 20 because of the whipping they put on a good Minnesota team.

Then you get to the 1970s, and that was really the golden age of dynasties. We found in the voting that the teams that got the most votes were the ones that repeated, because that repetition validated the greatness of these teams over many years.

You had several dynasties at work, starting with the Dolphins. This was a team that won with the running game, won with the no-name defense—the first of the great zone defenses. Then you have the Oakland Raiders. Al Davis' Raiders. When you look at that team, it was more than "Just win, baby." It was always total annihilation and destruction. Burn the crops, level the buildings, poison the water, and strip the corpses. Total destruction. They only won one Super Bowl in that era, but they went to five AFC Championship Games.

Then you get to the Dallas Cowboys. And the Cowboys were America's Team. The corporate, slick, computerized, Tom Landry-style that won with system and strategy. They had the flex defense and multiple sets. That was a team with a certain style.

And then the final team of that era—the Tyrannosaurus Rex of dynasties—that's the Pittsburgh Steelers. They won with intimidation, with speed. They could beat you with a running game featuring Franco Harris and a passing game that had Terry Bradshaw, Lynn Swann, and John Stallworth. They had that great defense. And they also have more Hall of Famers than anyone else. The issue became which of the Steelers teams do you vote for? Some of the great dynasties like that suffered. With the Steelers, some voted for their 1978 team; others voted for the '79 team.

In the 1980s, you have two distinctive teams involved there. You have the 49ers, who are without question the greatest dynasty in the history of the game. From 1981 to 1994, they never had less than 10 wins except for the strike season, they were always in the playoffs, and they won five Super Bowls. But, again, you get into that dilemma over which 49ers team was the best?

The '84 team lost only one game and that was a disputed loss to the Steelers in the middle of the season. But how could you vote for the 1984 team when it didn't have Jerry Rice? Few teams went through the playoffs as dominant as the 49ers did in 1989. So those votes, in essence, were split.

And right in the middle of the 49ers' dynasty, you've got the Chicago Bears of 1985. The Bears' defense that season committed the most sustained work of defensive devastation ever seen on a pro field at any time. They were a force of completely unimaginable proportions. I liken those '85 Bears to one of those singing groups that had one great hit and then disappeared.

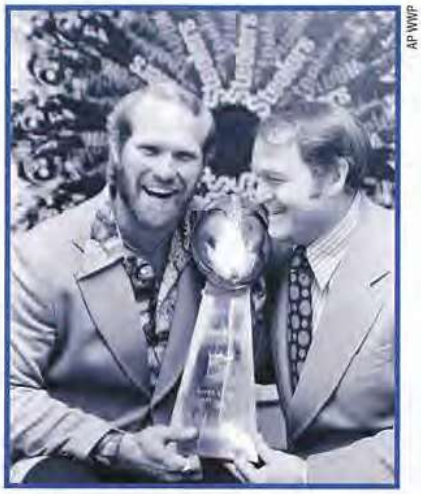
AMERICA'S GAME
THE SUPER BOWL CHAMPIONS

The countdown of the greatest Super Bowl winners of all time includes these champions:

1960s

Bart Starr was quarterback for the great Green Bay teams that won the first two Super Bowl titles.

1970s



AP WWP

Terry Bradshaw (left) and head coach Chuck Noll helped the Steelers raise the Lombardi Trophy four times during the '70s.

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SUPER BOWL XLI

I've always felt that true greatness on a football team was the juncture of excellence and originality. This was a team that not only had great players in guys like Walter Payton, Dan Hampton, and Mike Singletary. They were also running a style of defense—the 46—that was so original no one could figure it out, at least for one year. The next year they were knocked out in the playoffs, and they never came back as a contender again. The fact that they were only great for that one year allowed voters to concentrate on that team.

Then you go to the '90s and the Cowboys of Jimmy Johnson. The players there will tell you that if Jimmy hadn't left, they probably would have won four Super Bowls in a row as opposed to three out of four. And that's a team that had Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith, and Michael Irvin all in their prime. That's a really strong team that got a lot of votes.

Then you get to the current era and the Patriots—their 2003 team gets into the top 20. There's a feeling that while they might not be the best team, they are the best organization. The Patriots are to today's game what the Cleveland Browns, under Paul Brown, were to the 1950s. Their organization has set the tone and the style for other organizations to emulate.

CE: What did you learn from this project?

SS: There's a fallacy that championship teams just sort of steamroll through the season—never any injuries, never any problems, and never any controversies. The opposite is the truth. Almost every team...did not sail through the season. There were quarterback controversies, dilemmas, and injuries.

Just a few of the quarterback controversies: Staubach and Morton with the Cowboys; Bradshaw and Gilliam with the Steelers; Williams and Schroeder with the Redskins; Montana and Young with the 49ers. All of these were controversies that percolated and festered throughout the championship run, but the teams won in spite of it.

CE: Were there stories you had never heard before?

SS: There are one or two that stand out. In the 1974 season, things were going so bad for the Steelers that Joe Greene actually quit the team. He cleaned out his locker and went home, that's how frustrated he was. Chuck Noll and some of Greene's teammates convinced him to come back.

Another story is that before Super Bowl V [held at the Orange Bowl], rookie place-kicker Jim O'Brien told Ernie Accorsi, who was the Colts' PR man at the time, that he didn't like to kick on artificial turf. "I hope this doesn't come down to me," he said. And of course the whole game comes down to him kicking a field goal at the end, and he made it.

CE: Which team sparked the most debate in the voting for greatest team?

SS: The Dolphins are the most fascinating team, and the one debated most passionately both for and against. Whether or not they are the greatest team is a matter of debate. What isn't up for debate in my mind is that the 1972 Dolphins stand for what is best about the game of football. They were the epitome of teamwork, intelligence, and resourcefulness.

When you look at the Dolphins, they were not only undefeated, but they were the only team in history to lead the NFL in all meaningful offensive and defensive categories—points scored, total yards, you can go on and on. They won the AFC Championship Game on the road against Pittsburgh. And yet in the public's mind, they came into the Super Bowl as three-point underdogs to George Allen's Redskins, who had lost three games.

If Winston Churchill had been on our panel, he would have described the Miami Dolphins this way: They were criticized by many, they were praised by few, but they were defeated by none.

CE: In your years of covering the Super Bowl for NFL Films, which game is your favorite?

SS: I think my favorite would be Super Bowl IV, and not only because of the opportunity to put a microphone on Hank Stram—and for the first time ever to put the fans in the mind of the decision-maker in a championship game. To me, Super Bowl IV is the game that made the Super Bowl.

The Jets' win over the Colts made the Super Bowl theater for the masses, but it wasn't until the next year, when the Chiefs beat the Vikings, that the Super Bowl became a legitimate competition. That was a [butt]-kicking. Not that the Jets' win was a fluke, but the Chiefs' win was so decisive that everybody realized the Super Bowl was going to be a legitimate competition between two equal conferences every year.

Craig Ellenport is a content manager for Digital Media and Publishing for the NFL. To learn more about the America's Game *series, including the full list of Blue Ribbon Panel selectors, log on to www.nfl.com/americasgame.*

1980s

Phil Sandlin/AP WWP

The presence of Jerry Rice kept the 49ers among the NFL's elite for more than a decade.

1990s

Rob Brown/Wirelmage.com

Emmitt Smith was a big part of the Cowboys' title run in the 1990s, when they won three Super Bowls in four years.

2000s

Reuters/Corbis

Head coach Bill Belichick is the architect of the Patriots' recent Super Bowl success.

A GIANT PERFORMANCE

TWO DECADES AGO, THE GIANTS DELIVERED A SUPER BOWL TITLE TO THEIR FANS.

by Phil Simms

Has it really been 20 years since the Giants defeated Denver in Super Bowl XXI? Sometimes it seems like it was just yesterday; other times, it feels more like 40 years.

It really doesn't matter to me how long ago it was, because I am reminded of it nearly every day. There are not many places I can go in the New York metropolitan area without a Giants fan coming up to me and talking about it. And if the magnitude of the moment didn't hit home on Jan. 25, 1987, it certainly does now.

In fact, history has a way of making it feel bigger. Of course it's gotten bigger on our end because we won. And it's gotten bigger for me personally, having won the MVP. But I don't know that I ever put it in proper context at the time because I don't think I realized the enormity or the depth of what the Super Bowl was about as a player.

Heck, it was another game. Let's go out and win.

In New York, the culture of sports—and the love of the Giants in particular—is so strong. The Giants were a proud franchise that hadn't won an NFL Championship since 1956, and they had been through some pretty lean years in the '70s and early '80s. That long drought really fueled the fans' excitement about our Super Bowl run.

A lot of the folks I hear from are older fans who have been following the Giants for so long. But what I really get a kick out of is that group of guys in their late 20s, early 30s—which means they were in grade school when Super Bowl XXI was played and that it was probably their first impression of pro football. So they identify with that team in general, or with me individually.

Current CBS Sports broadcaster Phil Simms directed the New York Giants to their first Super Bowl crown, a 39-20 win over the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XXI in Pasadena. Simms earned MVP honors that day with as close to a perfect game as a quarterback can have, completing 22 of 25 passes for 268 yards and three touchdowns.

I know exactly how that feels. People wonder who my heroes were growing up, and I immediately think about when I first started getting that itch to follow pro football. The two big stars were Terry Bradshaw and Roger Staubach. They were Super Bowl heroes, and I thought the world of them.

While I wasn't necessarily thinking about Bradshaw or Staubach while we were getting ready for Super Bowl XXI, I did think this: If we went out there and lost, it could be the end of my career in New York. Seriously, that thought crossed my mind.

The night before we left for Southern California to get ready for the game, I had dinner with a good friend of mine. And he didn't mean this in a bad way, but he said, "You know if the Giants lose, everybody's going to blame you no matter what." And I thought, "Yeah, that's probably true. But the hell with everybody." I wasn't worried about it—I was in a pretty defiant mood that year, so I didn't care.

But while I refused to worry about what life would be like if we lost, I also hadn't considered what it would be like if we won. I certainly didn't think, "What if I have the game of my life and win the MVP?"

The key to success in football is preparation, pure and simple, and I maintain to this day that the success we had in Super Bowl XXI can be attributed to a solid week of practice and preparation.

We had already practiced the week before leaving for Pasadena. But we were in full pads that Monday and it was such an intense practice. We scrimmaged hard and there were even some fights. It set the tone for what turned out to be a tough week of practice.

That's not to say we didn't enjoy Super Bowl week. For me, that meant going out to dinner and then hanging around the hotel and relaxing after long days of practice. I'd just go room to room and visit with teammates—it was very much a college dorm feeling.

Of course, like any Super Bowl team, we had a few guys who preferred to go out every night. Yes, you could call it carousing. So my favorite part of Super Bowl week was sitting on the bus going to practice each morning, hearing about the escapades that took place the night before.

George Rose/Getty Images

The bond between the Giants and their fans rates among the strongest in sports.

I won't name names or go into any details, but will say this: Some of these stories were very, very funny. There were a few mornings I had tears running down my face from laughing so hard.

But as the week continued on and I was still laughing at these stories, it suddenly hit me that these guys going out every night might put us in some dire consequences come Super Bowl Sunday. And I remember saying to one of the culprits, "My god, we're gonna lose this game!"

And this particular guy—one of the lead partyers—said to me in all seriousness, "Don't worry, the Broncos are *much* worse than us." And that made me feel a whole lot better!

After four days of intense practices, we had an unusually easy one on Friday. We had rehearsed everything so much that even our coaches were getting tired of it. I remember throwing a pass over the middle—it was actually the first pass we ended up throwing in the game, a deep in-cut to Lionel Manuel—and [head coach] Bill Parcells said, "That's it, that's it. Good throw, Simms. You're sharp." And then he goes, "Now don't be *too* sharp—save some for the game."

He was not trying to be funny. We finished practice that day and there was this clear feeling that we were done. It was as if the coaches basically decided it was time to quit. We just went through the motions of finishing practice, because we knew we were ready.

I really enjoyed the week out there—all the obligations, the press, the interviews. And when it was time to play the game, I was feeling extremely positive. I was absolutely not worried about the outcome, and so I was truly willing to go down in flames. Losing never crossed my mind, and I'm convinced that helped me play the way I did.

You can't lose sight of the importance of matchups in football, and we knew our offense matched up well with Denver's defense. So regardless of what the stats say, it wasn't an extraordinary effort on my part.

Almost everything worked according to plan. If we had third-and-5, for example, there were one or two things we knew they would be doing on defense. It was a safe bet they would probably double team tight end Mark Bavaro in the formation we had. So on the first drive, when we were in that situation, we hit Stacey Robinson for a long gain.

And we knew we could make good on a couple of seam passes. We hit one to Bavaro on the opening drive and another to Lee Rouson in the third quarter. Then there was the flea flicker to Phil McConkey.

It seemed like, throughout my career, we connected on the flea flicker every time we called it. So when that play came in from the sideline, I was pretty pumped.

As much as any game in my career, the events of Super Bowl XXI happened just the way we planned them in practice.

Even without all the reminders, it remains an unforgettable day.

Malcolm Emmons/US Presswire

THE SUPER BOWL GALLERY

FEATURING CHAMPIONS I - XL

First World Championship Game AFL vs NFL

Green Bay 35, Kansas City 10
January 15, 1967
Memorial Coliseum (Los Angeles, CA)
MVP: Bart Starr (QB), Green Bay

- Starr completed 16 of 23 passes for 250 yards, including two touchdowns.
- Max McGee caught seven of Starr's passes for 138 yards and two TDs.
- Green Bay led, 14-10, at the half before scoring three second-half TDs.
- The Packers received $15,000 per player; each member of the Chiefs collected $7,500.

SUPER BOWL II

Green Bay 33, Oakland 14
January 14, 1968
Orange Bowl (Miami, FL)
MVP: Bart Starr (QB), Green Bay

- Starr was again MVP, after going 13 of 24 for 202 yards and a TD.
- Green Bay's Don Chandler kicked four field goals.
- The Packers' Herb Adderley scored the Super Bowl's first defensive TD on a 60-yard interception return.
- The game was the last for Vince Lombardi as Green Bay's coach.

SUPER BOWL III

N.Y. Jets 16, Baltimore 7
January 12, 1969
Orange Bowl (Miami, FL)
MVP: Joe Namath (QB), New York

- Namath, who "guaranteed" a win on the Thursday before the game, went 17 of 28 for 206 passing yards.
- The Jets' Matt Snell rushed for 121 yards and scored on a 4-yard run.
- The Jets intercepted Colts QB Earl Morrall three times in the first half.
- New York's win was the first by the AFL in the Super Bowl.

SUPER BOWL IV

Kansas City 23, Minnesota 7
January 11, 1970
Tulane Stadium (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Len Dawson (QB), Kansas City

- Dawson completed 12 of 17 passes and threw a 46-yard touchdown to Otis Taylor for the Chiefs' final score.
- Jan Stenerud's three FGs put the Chiefs' first nine points on the board.
- Kansas City forced five turnovers and held the Vikings to 67 yards rushing.
- Super Bowl IV marked the final game before the AFL-NFL merger.

SUPER BOWL V

Baltimore 16, Dallas 13
January 17, 1971
Orange Bowl (Miami, FL)
MVP: Chuck Howley (LB), Dallas

- Howley (two interceptions) became the first defender and only player from a losing team chosen MVP.
- Rookie Jim O'Brien's 32-yard field goal with five seconds to go broke a 13-13 tie; his winning kick was set up by a Mike Curtis interception.
- This was the first Super Bowl played on artificial turf.

SUPER BOWL VI

Dallas 24, Miami 3
January 16, 1972
Tulane Stadium (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Roger Staubach (QB), Dallas

- Staubach completed 12 of 19 passes for 119 yards and two touchdowns.
- Dallas' Duane Thomas rushed for 95 yards, including a 3-yard TD run, and Walt Garrison gained 74.
- Chuck Howley's fumble recovery and interception led to 10 Dallas points.
- The Cowboys allowed just 185 total yards and didn't give up a TD.

SUPER BOWL VII

Miami 14, Washington 7
January 14, 1973
Memorial Coliseum (Los Angeles, CA)
MVP: Jake Scott (S), Miami

- Scott intercepted a pair of passes, including one in the end zone.
- Miami scored all its points in the first half—on Bob Griese's 28-yard pass to Howard Twilley and Jim Kiick's 1-yard run.
- Including playoffs, the Dolphins went 17-0, accomplishing the only perfect season in NFL history.

SUPER BOWL VIII

Miami 24, Minnesota 7
January 13, 1974
Rice Stadium (Houston, TX)
MVP: Larry Csonka (RB), Miami

- Csonka rushed for 145 yards and opened the scoring with a 5-yard run. He later added a second touchdown.
- Jim Kiick scored on a 1-yard run and Garo Yepremian kicked a 28-yard field goal to make it 17-0 at halftime.
- Bob Griese threw only seven passes.
- The Dolphins became the first team to reach three straight Super Bowls.

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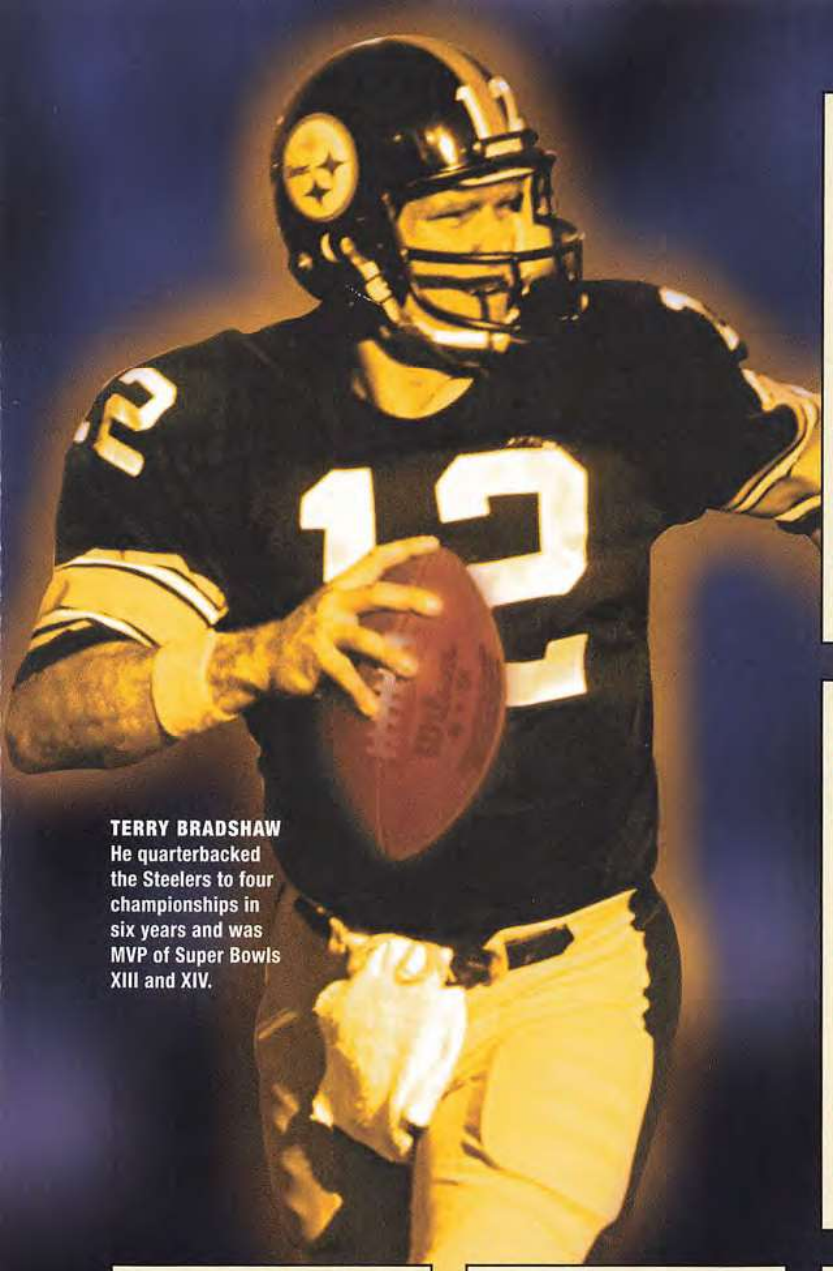


TERRY BRADSHAW
He quarterbacked the Steelers to four championships in six years and was MVP of Super Bowls XIII and XIV.

Malcolm Emmons/US Presswire

SUPER BOWL IX

Pittsburgh 16, Minnesota 6
January 12, 1975
Tulane Stadium (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Franco Harris (RB), Pittsburgh

- Harris rushed for 158 yards and scored on a 9-yard touchdown run.
- Terry Bradshaw threw a 4-yard TD pass to Larry Brown to clinch the win.
- Pittsburgh's defense yielded just 119 yards, including 17 rushing yards.
- Dwight White's second-quarter sack of Fran Tarkenton provided the Super Bowl with its first safety.

SUPER BOWL X

Pittsburgh 21, Dallas 17
January 18, 1976
Orange Bowl (Miami, FL)
MVP: Lynn Swann (WR), Pittsburgh

- Swann caught four passes for 161 yards, including a 64-yard TD.
- Terry Bradshaw threw for 209 yards and two touchdowns in the win.
- The Steelers' Roy Gerela added two fourth-quarter field goals and Reggie Harrison blocked a punt for a safety.
- Glen Edwards' end zone interception on the final play preserved the win.

SUPER BOWL XI

Oakland 32, Minnesota 14
January 9, 1977
Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)
MVP: Fred Biletnikoff (WR), Oakland

- Biletnikoff made four key catches and finished with 79 receiving yards.
- The Raiders' Clarence Davis rushed for 137 yards and Pete Banaszak scored twice on short runs.
- Oakland scored on three straight possessions to lead, 16-0, at halftime.
- Willie Brown's 75-yard interception return for a TD sealed the win.

SUPER BOWL XII

Dallas 27, Denver 10
January 15, 1978
Superdome (New Orleans, LA)
MVPs: Randy White (DT) and Harvey Martin (DE), Dallas

- White and Martin were part of a defensive effort that recovered four fumbles and intercepted four passes.
- Butch Johnson's diving 47-yard TD catch put the Cowboys ahead, 20-3.
- Dallas' Robert Newhouse closed out the scoring with his 29-yard touchdown pass to Golden Richards.

SUPER BOWL XIII

Pittsburgh 35, Dallas 31
January 21, 1979
Orange Bowl (Miami, FL)
MVP: Terry Bradshaw (QB), Pittsburgh

- Bradshaw completed 17 of 30 passes for 318 yards and four touchdowns.
- John Stallworth caught two first-half TDs, helping the Steelers lead, 21-14.
- Rocky Bleier had a TD and recovered an onside kick to clinch the win after Dallas had cut into a 35-17 deficit.
- Pittsburgh became the first team to capture three Super Bowl titles.

Super Bowl XIV

Pittsburgh 31, LA Rams 19
January 20, 1980
Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)
MVP: Terry Bradshaw (QB), Pittsburgh

- Bradshaw completed 14 of 21 passes for 309 yards, including a go-ahead 73-yard TD to John Stallworth.
- Lynn Swann had a 47-yard TD catch.
- Pittsburgh had trailed, 13-10, at halftime, and was behind, 19-17, entering the final quarter.
- The crowd of 103,985 made it the best-attended Super Bowl in history.

SUPER BOWL XV

Oakland 27, Philadelphia 10
January 25, 1981
Superdome (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Jim Plunkett (QB), Oakland

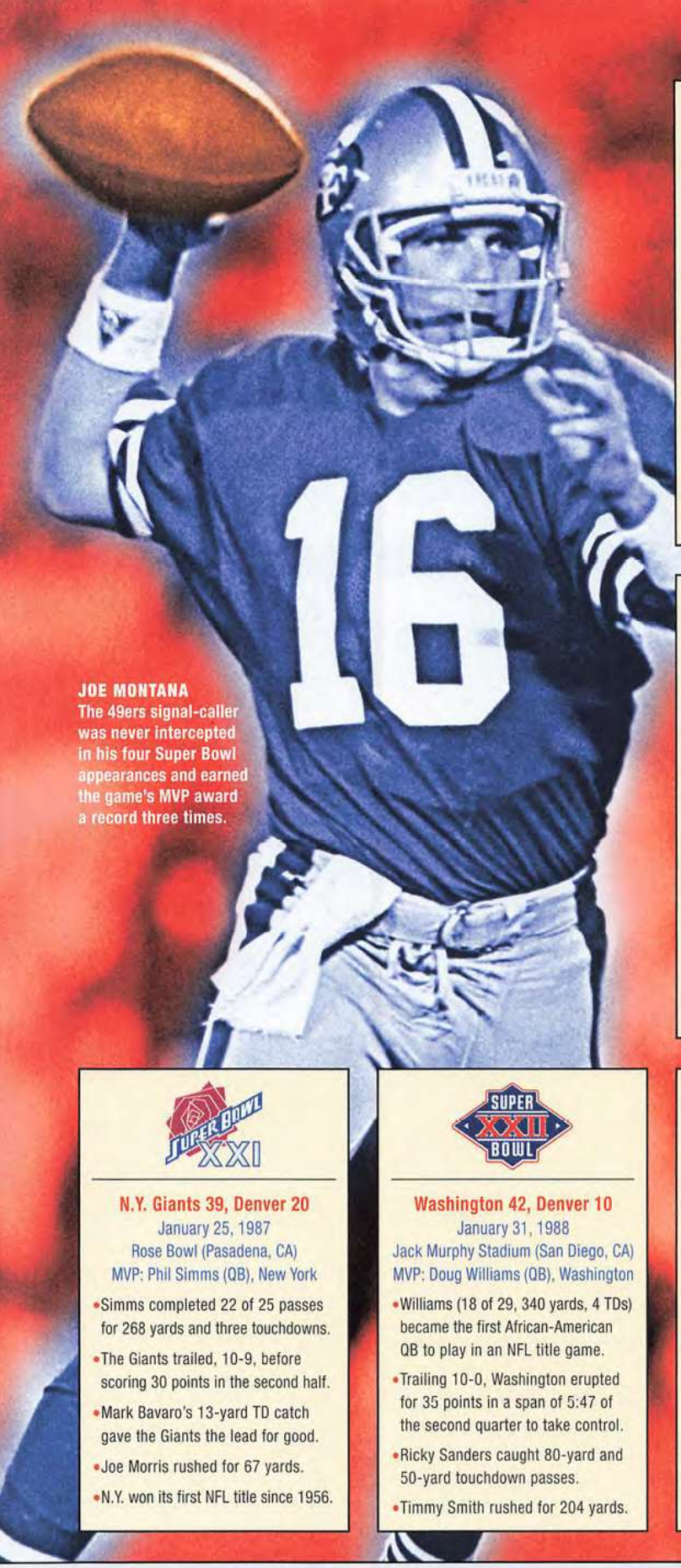
- Plunkett (13 of 21, 261 yards) had three touchdown passes, including an 80-yard throw to Kenny King that made it 14-0 late in the first quarter.
- Rod Martin's three interceptions set a Super Bowl record, and Mark van Eeghen rushed for 75 yards.
- The Raiders became the first Wild Card team to win the Super Bowl.

SUPER BOWL XVI

San Francisco 26, Cincinnati 21
January 24, 1982
Silverdome (Pontiac, MI)
MVP: Joe Montana (QB), San Francisco

- Montana (14 of 22, 157 yards) threw an 11-yard TD pass to Earl Cooper and ran for a 1-yard score.
- Ray Wersching kicked four field goals, two in the fourth quarter after Cincinnati pulled within 20-14.
- The Bengals became the first team to outgain their opponent (356 to 275 yards) and lose the Super Bowl.

IX X XI XII XIII XIV XV XVI



JOE MONTANA
The 49ers signal-caller was never intercepted in his four Super Bowl appearances and earned the game's MVP award a record three times.

Washington 27, Miami 17
January 30, 1983
Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)
MVP: John Riggins (RB), Washington

- Riggins rushed for 166 yards; his 43-yard TD run early in the fourth quarter put the Redskins ahead.
- Washington's Joe Theismann (15 of 23, 143 yards) threw TD passes to Alvin Garrett and Charlie Brown.
- Miami was held to 176 total yards.
- Washington captured its first NFL title since 1942.

L.A. Raiders 38, Washington 9
January 22, 1984
Tampa Stadium (Tampa, FL)
MVP: Marcus Allen (RB), Los Angeles

- Allen rushed for 191 yards and scored on TD runs of 5 and 74 yards.
- Oakland's Derrick Jensen recovered a blocked punt for the game's first score and Jack Squirek had a 5-yard interception return for a touchdown.
- Jim Plunkett completed 16 of 25 passes for 172 yards and one TD, a 12-yard throw to Cliff Branch.

San Francisco 38, Miami 16
January 20, 1985
Stanford Stadium (Stanford, CA)
MVP: Joe Montana (QB), San Francisco

- Montana threw for 331 yards and three touchdowns; he also rushed for 59 yards, including a 6-yard TD.
- Roger Craig became first player to score three TDs in a Super Bowl.
- Miami led, 10-7, before San Francisco took control, 28-16, at the half.
- The 49ers gained 537 total yards and led time of possession, 37:11 to 22:49.

Chicago 46, New England 10
January 26, 1986
Superdome (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Richard Dent (DE), Chicago

- Dent had 1.5 sacks and helped limit New England to 123 total yards.
- Jim McMahon became the first Super Bowl QB to rush for two touchdowns.
- Walter Payton rushed for 61 yards.
- Chicago posted seven sacks.
- The Bears captured their first NFL title since 1963.

N.Y. Giants 39, Denver 20
January 25, 1987
Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)
MVP: Phil Simms (QB), New York

- Simms completed 22 of 25 passes for 268 yards and three touchdowns.
- The Giants trailed, 10-9, before scoring 30 points in the second half.
- Mark Bavaro's 13-yard TD catch gave the Giants the lead for good.
- Joe Morris rushed for 67 yards.
- N.Y. won its first NFL title since 1956.

Washington 42, Denver 10
January 31, 1988
Jack Murphy Stadium (San Diego, CA)
MVP: Doug Williams (QB), Washington

- Williams (18 of 29, 340 yards, 4 TDs) became the first African-American QB to play in an NFL title game.
- Trailing 10-0, Washington erupted for 35 points in a span of 5:47 of the second quarter to take control.
- Ricky Sanders caught 80-yard and 50-yard touchdown passes.
- Timmy Smith rushed for 204 yards.

San Francisco 20, Cincinnati 16
January 22, 1989
Joe Robbie Stadium (Miami, FL)
MVP: Jerry Rice (WR), San Francisco

- Rice caught 11 passes for 215 yards, including a 14-yard touchdown.
- Joe Montana's 10-yard TD pass to John Taylor with 34 seconds to play lifted the 49ers to victory.
- The Bengals had gone ahead, 16-13, on Jim Breech's 40-yard field goal.
- Montana finished with 357 passing yards and two touchdowns.

San Francisco 55, Denver 10
January 28, 1990
Superdome (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Joe Montana (QB), San Francisco

- Montana became the Super Bowl's first three-time MVP after completing 22 of 29 passes for 297 yards and five touchdowns.
- Jerry Rice caught seven passes for 148 yards and three TDs.
- San Francisco held Denver to 12 first downs and 167 total yards, while its 55 points set a Super Bowl record.

US Presswire

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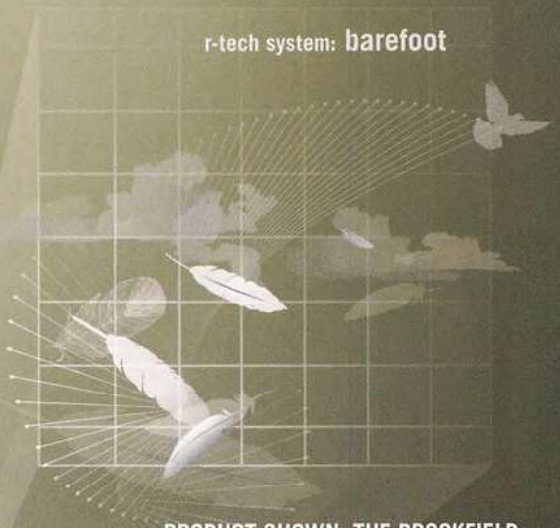

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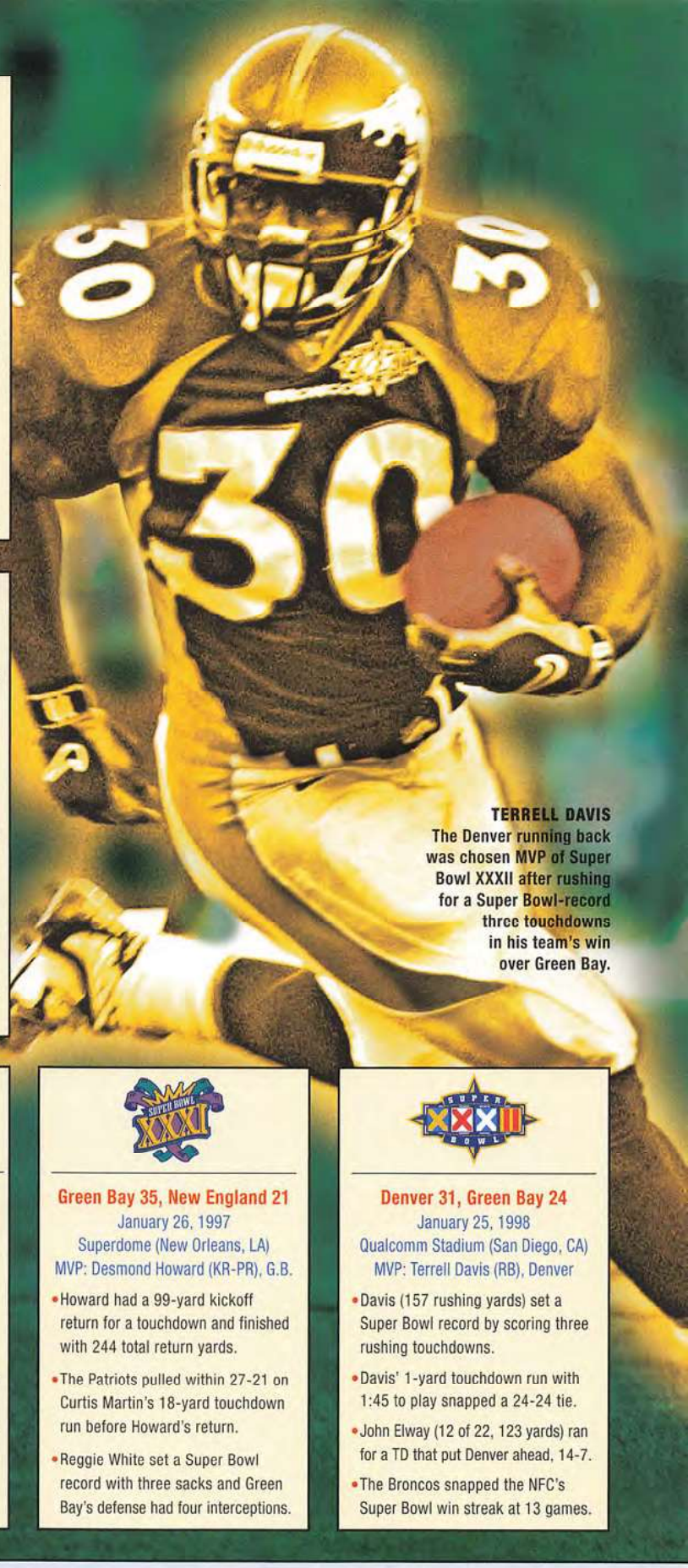


TERRELL DAVIS
The Denver running back was chosen MVP of Super Bowl XXXII after rushing for a Super Bowl-record three touchdowns in his team's win over Green Bay.

Ed Reinke/AP WWP

N.Y. Giants 20, Buffalo 19
January 27, 1991
Tampa Stadium (Tampa, FL)
MVP: Ottis Anderson (RB), New York

- Anderson rushed 21 times for 102 yards and one touchdown.
- Thurman Thomas' 31-yard TD run gave Buffalo a 19-17 lead before Matt Bahr's 21-yard field goal put the Giants ahead for good.
- Jeff Hostetler (20 of 32, 222 yards) helped New York set a Super Bowl mark for time of possession (40:33).

Washington 37, Buffalo 24
January 26, 1992
Metrodome (Minneapolis, MN)
MVP: Mark Rypien (QB), Washington

- Rypien completed 18 of 33 passes for 292 yards with two touchdowns.
- Washington built a 24-0 lead when Gerald Riggs scored his second TD of the game on a 2-yard run.
- Buffalo pulled within 24-10 before Gary Clark's 30-yard TD reception and two Chip Lohmiller field goals.
- The Redskins intercepted four passes.

Dallas 52, Buffalo 17
January 31, 1993
Rose Bowl (Pasadena, CA)
MVP: Troy Aikman (QB), Dallas

- Aikman completed 22 of 30 passes for 273 yards and four touchdowns.
- Dallas' defense forced nine turnovers.
- The Cowboys led, 28-10, at the half after Michael Irvin caught 19-yard and 18-yard TDs 18 seconds apart.
- Buffalo pulled within 31-17 before Dallas scored three touchdowns in a 2:33 span of the fourth quarter.

Dallas 30, Buffalo 13
January 30, 1994
Georgia Dome (Atlanta, GA)
MVP: Emmitt Smith (RB), Dallas

- Smith rushed for 132 yards and scored two second-half touchdowns.
- Buffalo led, 13-6, at the half on Thurman Thomas' TD run and a pair of Steve Christie field goals.
- James Washington's 46-yard fumble return for a TD tied the game.
- Dallas became first team to start 0-2 and go on to win the Super Bowl.

San Francisco 49, San Diego 26
January 29, 1995
Joe Robbie Stadium (Miami, FL)
MVP: Steve Young (QB), San Francisco

- Young passed for 325 yards and threw a Super Bowl-record six TDs.
- Both Ricky Watters and Jerry Rice scored three times in the win. Rice finished the game with 10 catches.
- The teams combined for 75 points, setting a Super Bowl record.
- San Francisco became the first team to win five Super Bowl titles.

Dallas 27, Pittsburgh 17
January 28, 1996
Sun Devil Stadium (Tempe, AZ)
MVP: Larry Brown (CB), Dallas

- Brown had two interceptions leading to 14 Cowboys points.
- Dallas, making its record eighth Super Bowl appearance, scored on its first three possessions to lead 13-0.
- After Brown's second pickoff, Emmitt Smith's 4-yard TD run made it 27-17.
- Troy Aikman completed 15 of 23 passes for 209 yards.

Green Bay 35, New England 21
January 26, 1997
Superdome (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Desmond Howard (KR-PR), G.B.

- Howard had a 99-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and finished with 244 total return yards.
- The Patriots pulled within 27-21 on Curtis Martin's 18-yard touchdown run before Howard's return.
- Reggie White set a Super Bowl record with three sacks and Green Bay's defense had four interceptions.

Denver 31, Green Bay 24
January 25, 1998
Qualcomm Stadium (San Diego, CA)
MVP: Terrell Davis (RB), Denver

- Davis (157 rushing yards) set a Super Bowl record by scoring three rushing touchdowns.
- Davis' 1-yard touchdown run with 1:45 to play snapped a 24-24 tie.
- John Elway (12 of 22, 123 yards) ran for a TD that put Denver ahead, 14-7.
- The Broncos snapped the NFC's Super Bowl win streak at 13 games.

XXV XXVI XXVII XXVIII XXIX XXX XXXI XXXII

Denver 34, Atlanta 19
January 31, 1999
Pro Player Stadium (Miami, FL)
MVP: John Elway (QB), Denver

- Elway, playing his final game, threw for 336 yards and rushed for a TD.
- Terrell Davis rushed for 102 yards and Rod Smith had 152 receiving yards, including an 80-yard TD catch.
- Howard Griffith scored on two short touchdown runs for the Broncos, who became first AFC team in 19 years to win consecutive Super Bowls.

St. Louis 23, Tennessee 16
January 30, 2000
Georgia Dome (Atlanta, GA)
MVP: Kurt Warner (QB), St. Louis

- Warner completed 24 of 45 passes for 414 yards and a pair of TDs.
- The Titans tied the game after trailing, 16-0, before Isaac Bruce's 73-yard touchdown catch with 1:54 to play gave the Rams the lead for good.
- Mike Jones preserved the win when he tackled the Titans' Kevin Dyson at St. Louis' 1-yard line as time expired.

Baltimore 34, N.Y. Giants 7
January 28, 2001
Raymond James Stadium (Tampa, FL)
MVP: Ray Lewis (LB), Baltimore

- Lewis helped force five turnovers and kept New York's offense from scoring.
- Brandon Stokley's 38-yard TD catch from Trent Dilfer made it 7-0.
- The teams combined for three TDs in a span of 36 seconds, which included back-to-back kickoff returns by the Giants' Ron Dixon (97 yards) and the Ravens' Jermaine Lewis (84 yards).

New England 20, St. Louis 17
February 3, 2002
Superdome (New Orleans, LA)
MVP: Tom Brady (QB), New England

- Brady completed 16 of 27 passes for 145 yards and one touchdown.
- Adam Vinatieri's 48-yard field goal as time expired gave the Patriots the victory, making it the first Super Bowl won on the final play.
- Although the Rams had more total yards, 427-267, New England forced three turnovers that led to 17 points.

Tampa Bay 48, Oakland 21
January 26, 2003
Qualcomm Stadium (San Diego, CA)
MVP: Dexter Jackson (S), Tampa Bay

- Jackson grabbed the first two of Tampa Bay's five interceptions.
- The Buccaneers returned three interceptions for touchdowns—two by Dwight Smith and the third by Derrick Brooks.
- This was the first time the NFL's top offense (Oakland) and top defense (Tampa) had met in the Super Bowl.

New England 32, Carolina 29
February 1, 2004
Reliant Stadium (Houston, TX)
MVP: Tom Brady (QB), New England

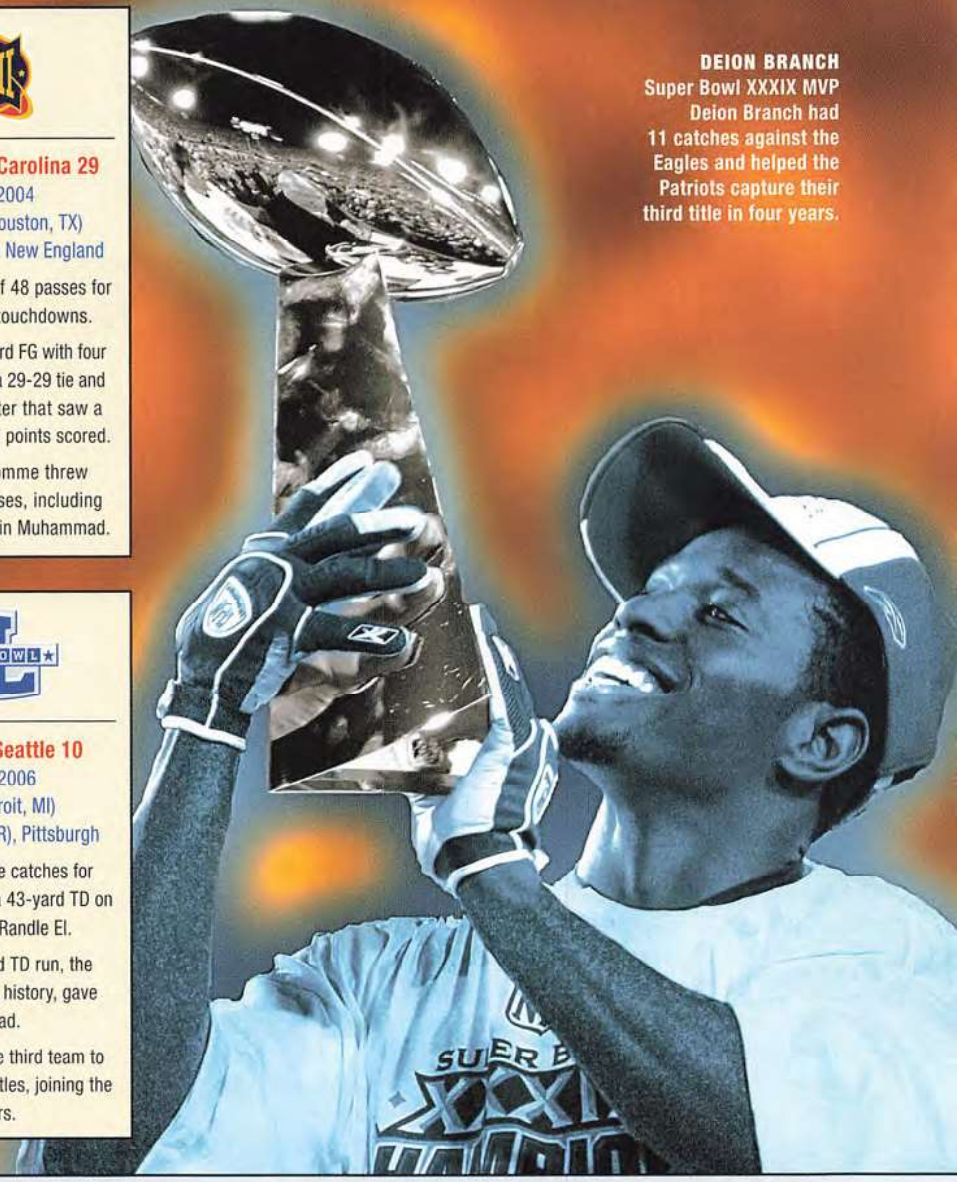
- Brady completed 32 of 48 passes for 354 yards and three touchdowns.
- Adam Vinatieri's 41-yard FG with four seconds left snapped a 29-29 tie and capped a fourth quarter that saw a Super Bowl-record 37 points scored.
- Carolina's Jake Delhomme threw three touchdown passes, including an 85-yarder to Muhsin Muhammad.

New England 24, Philadelphia 21
February 6, 2005
ALLTEL Stadium (Jacksonville, FL)
MVP: Deion Branch (WR), New England

- Branch had 11 catches for 133 yards as New England won its third Super Bowl in four seasons.
- Tom Brady completed 23 of 33 passes for 236 yards and two TDs.
- Corey Dillon's 2-yard touchdown run with 13:44 to play broke a 14-14 tie.
- The second of Rodney Harrison's two interceptions sealed the Patriots' win.

Pittsburgh 21, Seattle 10
February 5, 2006
Ford Field (Detroit, MI)
MVP: Hines Ward (WR), Pittsburgh

- Ward finished with five catches for 123 yards, including a 43-yard TD on a pass from Antwaan Randle El.
- Willie Parker's 75-yard TD run, the longest in Super Bowl history, gave the Steelers a 14-3 lead.
- Pittsburgh became the third team to win five Super Bowl titles, joining the Cowboys and the 49ers.



Chris O'Meara/AP WWP

DEION BRANCH
Super Bowl XXXIX MVP
Deion Branch had 11 catches against the Eagles and helped the Patriots capture their third title in four years.

XXXIII XXXIV XXXV XXXVI XXXVII XXXVIII XXXIX XL

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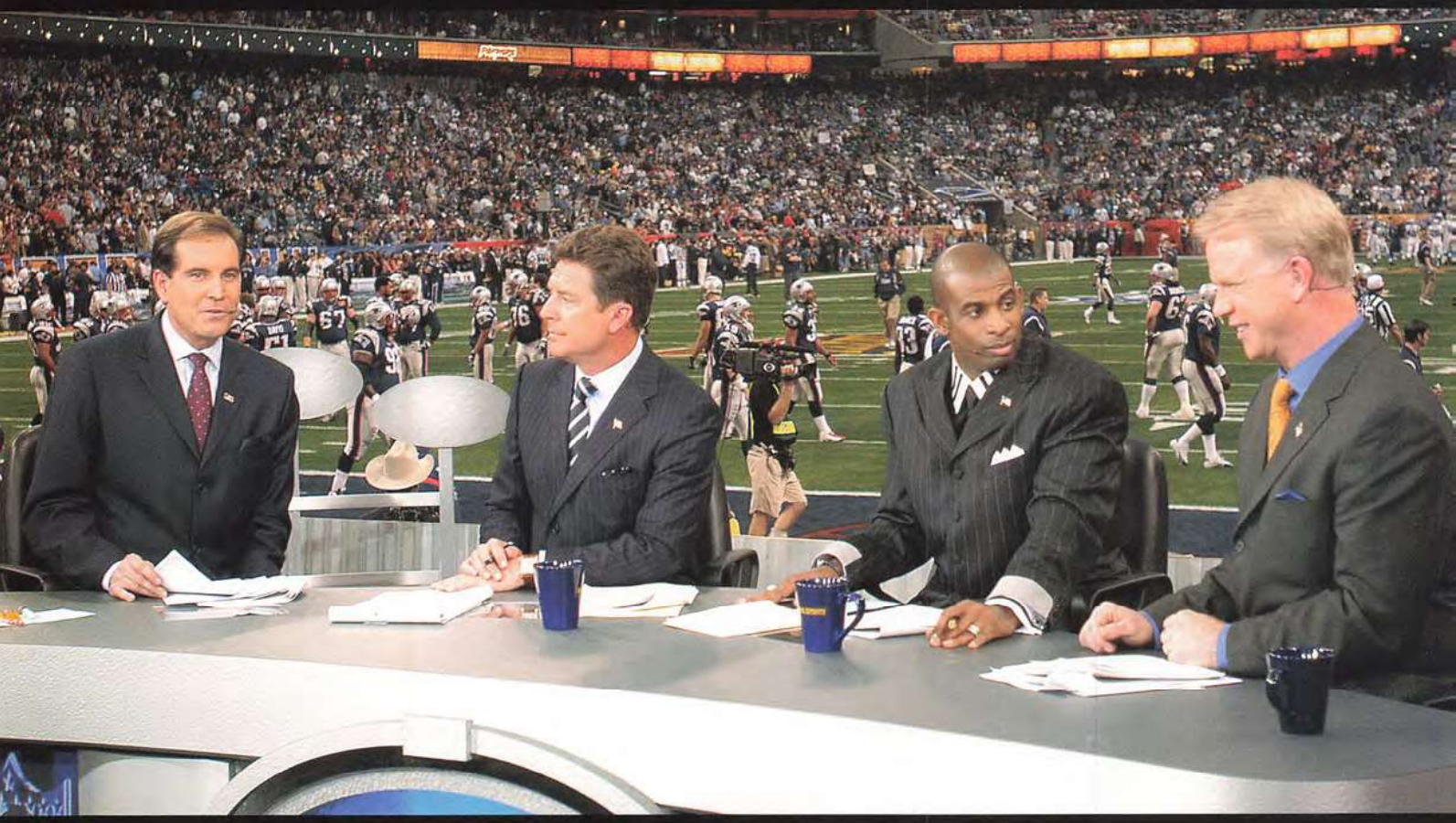
THE PRESSURES OF A SUPER BOWL AREN'T JUST ON THE TEAMS. THOSE BROADCASTING THE GAME KNOW IT CAN MAKE OR BREAK THEIR SEASON, TOO.

by Leonard Shapiro



"Doing the Super Bowl is obviously a check mark for your career. In our business, it's the highest achievement in sports broadcasting." ~Jim Nantz

The first time Joe Buck was the lead announcer for Major League Baseball's World Series—on FOX back in 1996—he began the first inning of his first game with a dysfunctional headset that left him incommunicado with the production crew in the truck and forced him to use an old style, hand-held microphone. Nine years later, as he prepared to call his first Super Bowl—XXXIX in Jacksonville—the memory of that misadventure was in the back of his mind.

"I was a little worried that, just my luck, something like that might actually happen again," Buck says. "The last thing you want to hear is *The Brady Bunch* in your headset."

It never happened, and Buck's Super Bowl play-by-play debut was greeted with favorable reviews, as was FOX's overall production. No missed replays, no verbal gaffes in the booth, no dreaded glitches whatsoever before, during, or after America's most-watched television show of the year, which reached a worldwide audience of a billion people in 234 countries. In the sport of broadcasting, it was a clean victory.

The same cannot be said for several of those who preceded Buck in this ultimate assignment for any announcer, going all the way back to Super Bowl I. That historic game between the Packers and Chiefs was carried by both CBS and NBC, the broadcast partners of the established NFL (CBS) and the upstart American Football League (NBC) in the years before the leagues formally merged. CBS narrowly won the ratings contest, though that was mostly because NFL teams were located in the nation's largest markets.

Jack Whitaker and the late Ray Scott were the broadcasters in the booth that day for CBS. It was decided that Scott would handle first-half play-by-play duties, with Whitaker taking over after intermission.

"I took my seat and they [the Packers] kicked off to start the second half," recalls Whitaker. "All of a sudden, whistles are blowing all over the field. I didn't see any flags and I had no idea what was going on, the worst situation any broadcaster can find himself in.

"Then I looked over at Frank Gifford, who was working with me, and his shoulders were slumped, too, because he had no clue either. A few seconds later, we learned why they stopped. NBC had been in a commercial break during the kickoff, so they had to have a do-over for television. I'd never seen anything like it."

The late Curt Gowdy handled NBC's play-by-play for that game and once told an interviewer, "The network battle turned out more competitive than the game itself. The promotional hoopla was beyond the saturation point. There were meetings after meetings in the weeks before the game, with the rival executives resembling battle staffs. The announcers [for the two networks] got along well, but we were caught in the middle of all these strategy meetings."

Still, about five minutes before the game began, Gowdy said he had broadcaster's version of an epiphany.

"I suddenly said to myself, 'Gowdy, you've broadcast football for years and witnessed thousands of games. This is where experience is really going to help you, and you're prepared. Just report the ball game.' And that's just what [Paul] Christman and I did. Knowing I had seen just about everything there was to see and knowing I had prepared thoroughly made me at ease and confident."

Over the years, countless Super Bowl broadcasters have essentially tried to follow the same "it's just a football game" mantra, even if they know full well it's not.

"It will never be just another game," says NBC's John Madden, who worked his first Super Bowl for CBS in Pontiac, Mich., in 1982 and promptly sat on partner Pat Summerall's headset while they were doing the opening to the game. "I don't know if there are nerves, but I still get butterflies. You know how big it is. You have two weeks to prepare, two weeks of hype, two weeks to just think about it."

"If you started to think about it, you'd drive yourself crazy," says Jim Nantz, CBS' play-by-play man for this year's Super Bowl in South Florida. For Nantz, it also will be the first leg of a broadcaster's dream schedule that takes him to the NCAA Final Four and The Masters, all within a head-spinning span of 63 days.

Paul Spinelli/Getty Images

Cameras swarm Steelers tackle Max Starks and head coach Bill Cowher following Super Bowl XL.

"Doing the Super Bowl is obviously a check mark for your career," says Nantz, who hosted CBS' *The NFL Today* pregame show for six years before returning to play-by-play duties in 2004. "In our business, it's the highest achievement in sports broadcasting.

"But I won't change my preparation, even with two weeks in between. I'll have been calling games for 20 straight weeks, and we'll have just done the AFC Championship Game," he says. "You're so conditioned to doing the same routine, and it's really nice to know that the guy sitting next to me [analyst Phil Simms] has gone to every meeting, read every clip, and talked to everyone. He can finish any sentence I start."

Simms recalls working his first Super Bowl in 1996, joining Dick Enberg and Paul Maguire in the booth for NBC. At one point, Enberg tried to convince him that he was going to be extremely nervous in the minutes before the opening kickoff, but Simms wasn't having any of it.

"I told [Dick] I had a foolproof plan not to get nervous," Simms says. "All I had to do was look over at Maguire and say to myself, 'If that guy's up here in the booth, it can't be that big of a deal.' Paul and I wanted to play gin rummy until the red light went on."

When CBS Sports televised Super Bowl XXXVIII between the Patriots and Panthers, its *Super Bowl Today* pregame show—with (left to right) Jim Nantz, Dan Marino, Deion Sanders, and Boomer Esiason—took place inside Houston's Reliant Stadium.

John Filo/CBS

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Super Bowl broadcasters over the years have included (left to right): Paul Christman and Frank Gifford; Curt Gowdy; Pat Summerall and John Madden; and Joe Buck.

For any network, having the Super Bowl on its schedule is a big deal for a wide variety of reasons, not the least of which is gaining a promotional platform to reach the largest audience of the year—from the time the pregame show begins in mid-afternoon to the presentation of the Vince Lombardi Trophy in the heart of prime time.

"The single most important thing about the Super Bowl when you look across the landscape of events in the United States—July 4th, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas—is that as special as all those days are, there is nothing like Super Bowl Sunday," says Dick Ebersol, chairman of NBC Sports. "It's the greatest gathering of football fans and non-football fans. It's the viewing experience of the commercials, the enormous musical extravaganza at halftime and, of course, the game itself.

"And look what it can do for your prime-time shows," he adds. "ABC had it last year with *Grey's Anatomy* right after the game. It became a huge hit for them, all because of the Super Bowl exposure."

"You can't find that viewership anywhere else. It gives you the ultimate payoff across the board."

~Sean McManus, President of CBS News & CBS Sports

Eric Charbonneau/Wirelmage.com

Sean McManus, president of CBS News and CBS Sports, concurs.

"Obviously it engages the whole network," says McManus. "It's the most talked-about show of the year, and you've got it. It's an amazing promotional opportunity to launch or re-launch a prime-time show. You can't find that viewership anywhere else. It gives you the ultimate payoff across the board."

Not to mention the bottom line. Super Bowl TV advertising—this year with a price tag of $2.7 million per 30-second spot—also feeds the beast of a network's profit margin like no other event. In addition to selling their Super Bowl ad inventory, sales reps possess extra leverage to work out package deals with sponsors for commercials that air during pregame, halftime, and postgame, as well as other prime-time or sports programming throughout the year. The game also becomes a boon for the participating teams' local affiliates, helping boost ratings for news and prime-time broadcasts and increasing advertising dollars.

A network that carries the Super Bowl also becomes more attractive to the industry crème de la crème of on-air and production talent. One of the main reasons veteran broadcaster Al Michaels cited for leaving ESPN and *Monday Night Football* for NBC was the added bonus of the Peacock network getting two Super Bowls over the next six years.

Said one network programming executive, "Having the Super Bowl is the classic case of a rising tide lifting all boats. It impacts the network from the executive offices right down to the mail room."

In the CBS Sports production trucks parked outside Dolphin Stadium on Super Bowl Sunday, the boat better have smooth sailing. For the past year, Tony Petitti, the network's executive vice president and executive producer, has been formulating his own game plan, overseeing a new look in game graphics, building a new set for *The NFL Today* pregame show, and seeing to a thousand other occasionally maddening details.

"We had our first company-wide meeting on the game last February," he says. "And every day of the year I do something involving the Super Bowl—the sets, the talent, the production, all the other programming. In the days leading up to the game, there's a lot of nervous energy. The last time we did it [in Houston], I didn't anticipate how anxious I'd be, because you want it to be perfect."

Artie Kempner, a veteran director for FOX, worked his first Super Bowl as a CBS graphics coordinator at Super Bowl XVIII in Tampa. His abiding memory of that day involves former pregame show analyst Irv Cross standing on the Raiders sideline trying to do a report while someone on the field was cursing at him to get out of the way…all while Cross was on the air.

When Kempner's first shot as lead director for a Super Bowl occurred in Jacksonville, he was eminently prepared. As far back as 1997, he began thinking about how he wanted to cover the game if he got the chance, how many cameras and replay machines he'd like to have, and he actually wrote down a plan of attack if the opportunity ever arose.

"There's a pressure you don't face in any other telecast," he says. "I've worked Final Fours, The Masters, Daytona 500s, and I don't think anything compares to the Super Bowl. It can overwhelm you if you let it, but once you're in the heat of the battle, you really find yourself doing it like any other game, just with more bells and whistles at your disposal."

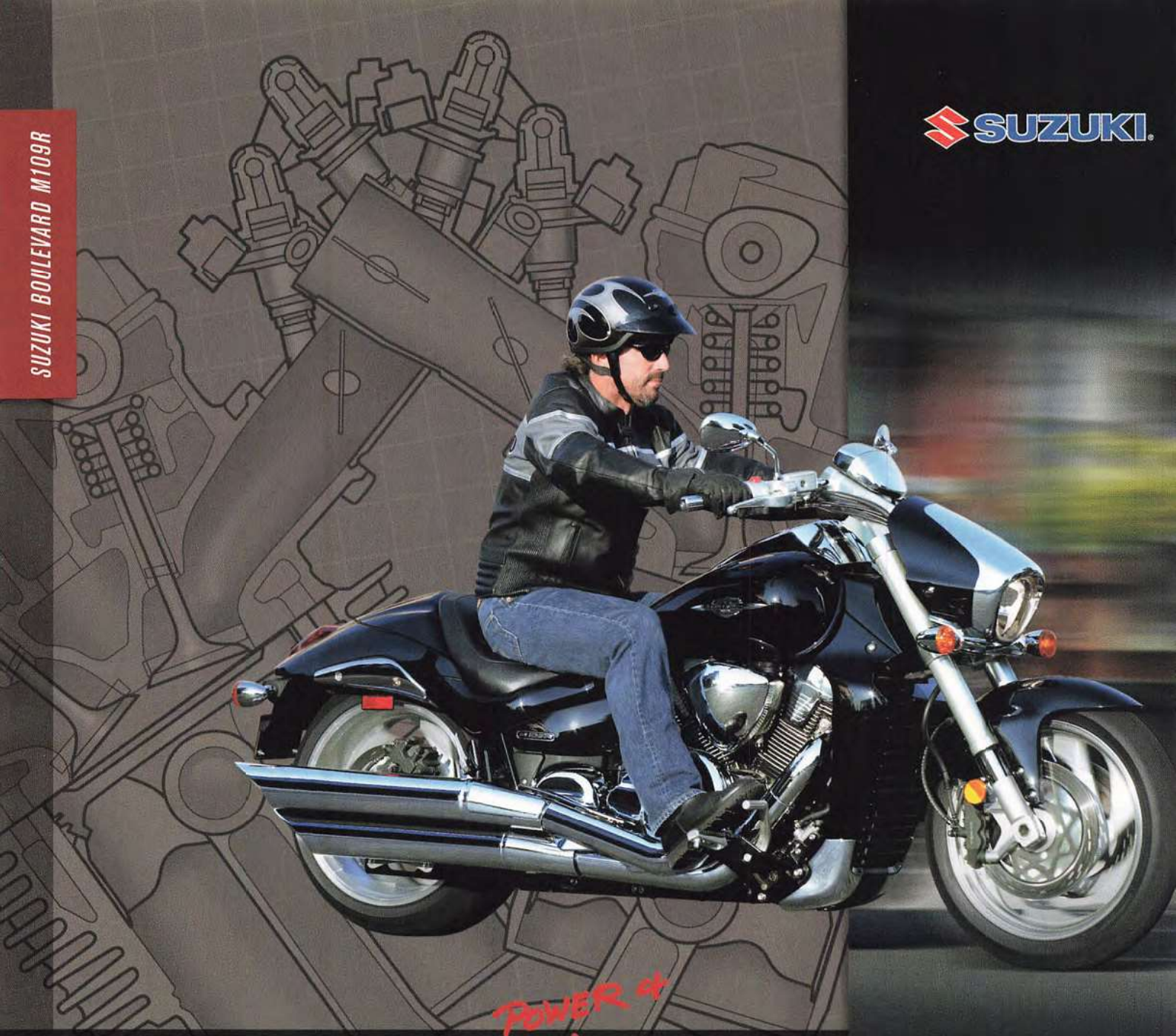
Lance Barrow, CBS' coordinating producer for this year's game, says his sense of urgency for Super Bowl XLI began building the day after last year's AFC title game. He's looking forward to having three times as many cameras and replay machines as he employs for regular-season games, but he also knows he's mostly going to stay with the basics.

"There's always a tendency to have too many gadgets," he says. "I always tell our crew when we do the championship game that it's still four quarters, still has a halftime, and still has only 11 guys on the field for each team. It's still a football game, no matter what they call it."

Leonard Shapiro has covered professional football for The Washington Post *since 1971.*

SUZUKI BOULEVARD M109R

SUZUKI



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SUPER BOWL XLI

SOUTH FLORIDA
02.04.07

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WHAT BEGAN AS 32 TEAMS WITH THE SHARED DREAM OF WINNING SUPER BOWL XLI HAS COME DOWN TO THE FINAL TWO WHO WILL BATTLE FOR THE COVETED VINCE LOMBARDI TROPHY AND LEAGUE SUPREMACY.

ENJOY THIS WEEK-BY-WEEK JOURNEY THROUGH THE 2006 NFL SEASON—RELIVING ALL ITS MEMORABLE MOMENTS—TO SEE HOW THESE TEAMS ARRIVED IN SOUTH FLORIDA READY FOR THIS ONE GAME AND TO LIVE THAT ONE DREAM.

WEEK 1 AN AWESOME OPENING WEEKEND

FROM ANY VANTAGE POINT, THE NFL'S KICKOFF WEEKEND WAS AN UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS. EVERY STADIUM WAS SOLD OUT, TELEVISION RATINGS WERE UP ACROSS THE BOARD, AND ENTICING STORYLINES FILLED THE SCHEDULE.

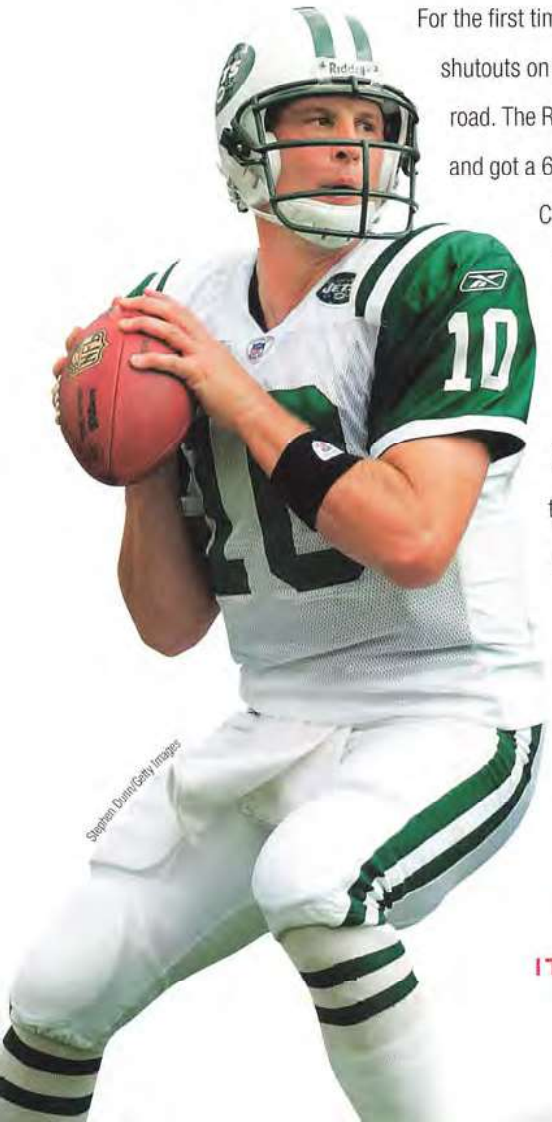
The 2006 season officially began with celebrations in South Florida and Pittsburgh, uniting the site of Super Bowl XLI with the home of the defending league champion. As 64,927 watched at Heinz Field and another 19.2 million tuned in on television, the Steelers rallied with two fourth-quarter touchdowns to defeat the Dolphins, 28-17. Seattle, meanwhile, returned to the site of Super Bowl XL and this time came away a winner as three Josh Brown field goals—the last one a 42-yarder on the game's final play—were enough to earn a 9-6 decision over Detroit at Ford Field.

At the Meadowlands, Peyton and Eli Manning took center stage in the first NFL game to feature brothers starting against each other at quarterback—the elder Peyton won the duel, throwing for 276 yards and a touchdown as the Colts beat the Giants, 26-21.

George Gojkovich/Getty Images

▲ **THE STEELER WAY. Head coach Bill Cowher speaks with Santonio Holmes during Pittsburgh's opening-night win.**

For the first time in 15 years, three NFL teams posted shutouts on the same weekend—and all were on the road. The Ravens limited Tampa Bay to 142 total yards and got a 60-yard interception return for a TD by Chris McAlister as part of their 27-0 victory. The Bears handed the Packers their first shutout since 1991—ending Green Bay's scoring streak at 233 games—with a 26-0 triumph at Lambeau Field. And in the week's final game—capping the first-ever regularly scheduled *Monday Night Football* doubleheader—San Diego stopped Oakland, 27-0, spoiling Art Shell's return to the Raiders sideline.



Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

◀ **SHOULDERING THE LOAD. Sidelined for 13 games in 2005 with a shoulder injury, Chad Pennington's return was right on target in the Jets' victory at Tennessee.**

STEEL CURTAIN RAISER

Diddy and Cassie performed on Miami Beach, Rascal Flatts and Martina McBride (below) continued the fun at Heinz Field, and the Steelers honored their five Super Bowl championship teams amid a huge fireworks display. And this was all before the game. *NFL Opening Kickoff 2006* turned into quite a show, and was capped by the Steelers' come-from-behind victory against Miami orchestrated by QB Charlie Batch. Starting in place of Ben Roethlisberger, who was sidelined following appendectomy surgery, Batch threw three TD passes, the last an 87-yard hook-up with tight end Heath Miller that gave Pittsburgh a 21-17 fourth-quarter lead. "I stared down Hines [Ward], hit Heath over the top, and the rest is history," said Batch, who finished the game 15 of 25 for 209 yards. Two late Miami drives ended with interceptions, one that linebacker Joey Porter returned 42 yards for an insurance touchdown.

Paul Spinelli/Getty Images

"I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE. IT'S LIKE AN UGLY BABY...YOU NEVER SEE ONE."

~Seattle defensive end Bryce Fisher, on whether the Seahawks' 9-6 victory over the Lions could be characterized as an "ugly win."

Travis Lindquist/Getty Images

▲ BROTHERS FIRST. Eli (left) and Peyton Manning share a few words after their historic meeting at the Meadowlands. Peyton's Colts defeated the Giants, 26-21.

Elsa/Getty Images

▲ THERE GOES ANOTHER. The Rams' Jeff Wilkins watches one of his six field goals.

Jed Jacobsohn/Getty Images

▲ ANKLES AWAY. Shawne Merriman grabs hold of Raiders quarterback Aaron Brooks during the Chargers' 27-0 win, one of three shutouts in the season's first week.

STARTING OUT RIGHT

Ten teams opened 2006 with new head coaches and the four who won—the Rams' Scott Linehan, the Jets' Eric Mangini, the Saints' Sean Payton, and the Vikings' Brad Childress—were all making their head coaching debuts. Both St. Louis and Minnesota beat teams that reached the playoffs in 2005. The Rams defeated Denver, 18-10, with all of their points coming off the right foot of Jeff Wilkins, who kicked a franchise-record six field goals. The Vikings shaded the Redskins, 19-16, on a 31-yard Ryan Longwell FG with one minute to go. "I'm just happy for those guys in the locker room," said Childress, who took on the Minnesota job after seven years of running the Eagles' offense. "They faced a lot of adversity. It was an away game, a Monday night, a Hall of Fame coach [Joe Gibbs]—I'm pleased with what they accomplished." QB Brad Johnson, a 15-year veteran who spent two years with Washington, threw for 223 yards, including a 20-yard TD to Marcus Robinson that gave the Vikings a third-quarter lead. In addition to a new coach, New Orleans' win at Cleveland featured the debut of running back Reggie Bush, who accounted for 141 total yards. "I'd probably give myself a 'B,'" he said of his performance. "I didn't get in the end zone."

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Arizona opened its new $455 million University of Phoenix Stadium (site of Super Bowl XLII) with a 34-27 triumph over the 49ers. QB Kurt Warner's favorite target was Larry Fitzgerald, who had nine catches for 133 yards... Chad Pennington capped his 319-yard passing performance with a game-winning 12-yard TD to Chris Baker as the Jets beat the Titans, 23-16...The week's top rusher was the Falcons' Warrick Dunn, who gained 132 yards in a 20-6 win at Carolina... The Broncos' Rod Smith reached 800 career receptions, making three grabs in the team's loss to the Rams...Byron Leftwich snapped a fourth-quarter tie with his 3-yard TD run in the Jaguars' 24-17 win over the Cowboys. Linebacker Mike Peterson later sealed the triumph with an interception in the final minute...New Eagles receiver Donté Stallworth had six catches, including a 42-yard TD, in a 24-10 win at Houston...Road teams won 11 of the weekend's 16 games, the most in Week One since 1983.

WEEK 1

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

THURSDAY, SEPT. 7

@ Pittsburgh 28 ..... Miami 17

SUNDAY, SEPT. 10

@ Arizona 34 ..... San Francisco 27
Atlanta 20 ..... @ Carolina 6
Baltimore 27 ..... @ Tampa Bay 0
Chicago 26 ..... @ Green Bay 0
Cincinnati 23 ..... @ Kansas City 10
@ Jacksonville 24 ..... Dallas 17
@ New England 19 ..... Buffalo 17
New Orleans 19 ..... @ Cleveland 14
N.Y. Jets 23 ..... @ Tennessee 16
Philadelphia 24 ..... @ Houston 10
@ St. Louis 18 ..... Denver 10
Seattle 9 ..... @ Detroit 6
Indianapolis 26 ..... @ N.Y. Giants 21

MONDAY, SEPT. 11

Minnesota 19 ..... @ Washington 16
San Diego 27 ..... @ Oakland 0

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Chad Pennington (QB, Jets): Completed 24 of 33 passes for 319 yards and two TDs—posting a 123.2 passer rating—in win over the Titans.

DEFENSE

Ray Lewis (LB, Ravens): Led team with 10 tackles, including a sack, and also defensed two passes in shutout of Tampa Bay.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Adam Vinatieri (K, Colts): Perfect 4-of-4 on field goals in Indy debut, making kicks from 26, 32, 48, and 32 yards in victory over the Giants.

OFFENSE

Kurt Warner (QB, Cardinals): Threw for 301 yards and three TDs, and had an NFC-leading 114.8 passer rating, as part of victory over 49ers.

DEFENSE

John Abraham (DE, Falcons): Had five tackles, including two sacks, and forced a pair of fumbles as Atlanta kept Carolina out of the end zone.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Jeff Wilkins (K, Rams): Kicked a franchise-record six FGs (on seven attempts), including ones from 48 and 51 yards, to help defeat Denver.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Reggie Bush (RB, Saints): Rushed for 61 yards and caught eight passes for 58 yards in win over the Browns.

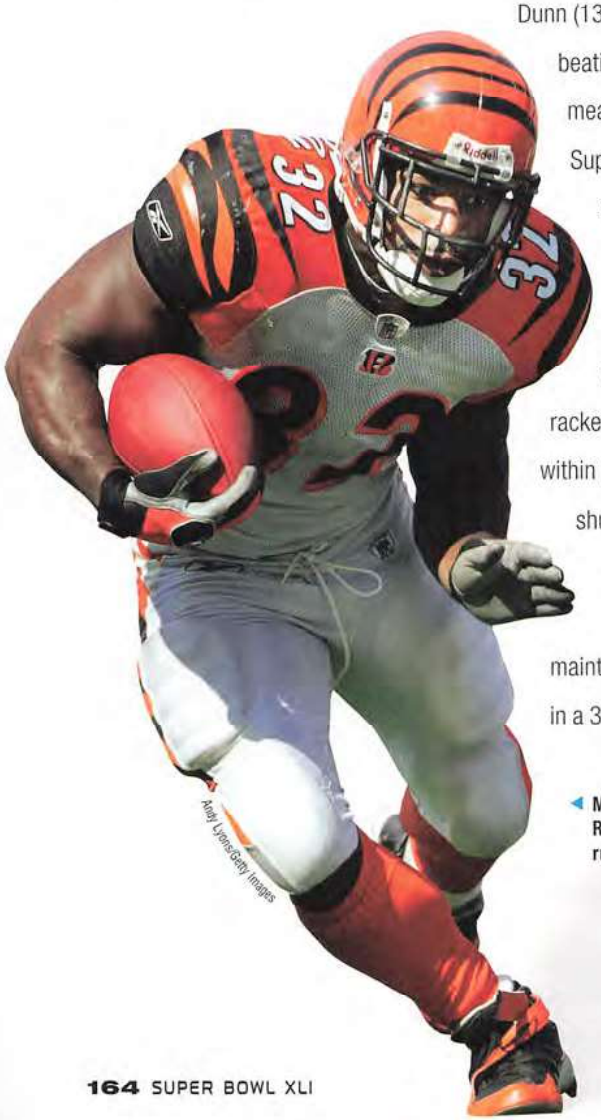
WEEK 2 ALTERNATE ROUTES, SAME DESTINATION

FOR SOME, IT WAS ABOUT OFFENSE. FOR OTHERS, DEFENSE DICTATED THE DAY. AND FOR A FEW, DOMINANCE WAS EXHIBITED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BALL. BUT WHATEVER THE METHOD, 11 TEAMS REMAINED UNBEATEN AFTER THE SECOND WEEK OF PLAY.

The high scorers included the Colts, Bengals, and Saints—who were among a group of six teams that put at least 30 points on the scoreboard. Peyton Manning threw for a Week Two-leading 400 yards and three touchdowns in a 43-24 win over the Texans, marking Indianapolis' ninth straight series victory. Carson Palmer had 352 passing yards and Rudi Johnson added another 145 on the ground in Cincinnati's 34-17 triumph over the Browns, while surprising New Orleans won its second straight road contest, 34-27 at Green Bay, as Drew Brees' 35-yard TD pass to Marques Colston broke a fourth-quarter tie.

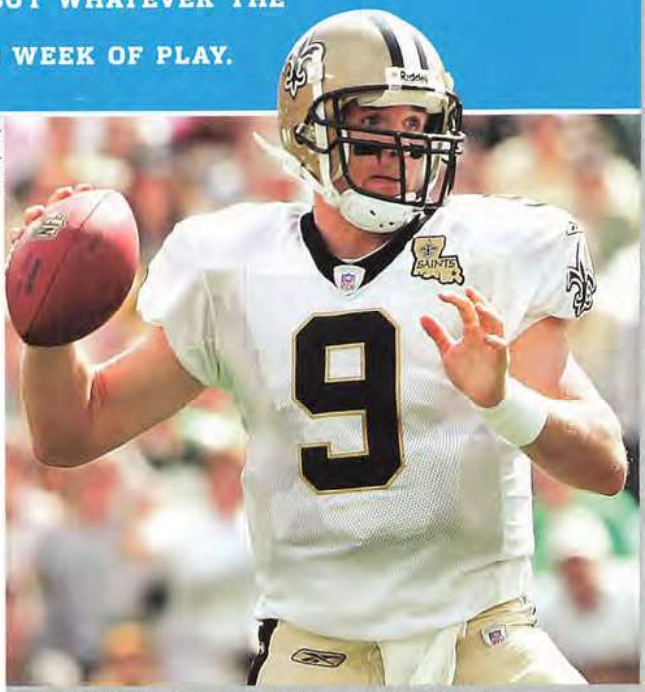
Across the line of scrimmage, the Ravens denied a second straight opponent from reaching the end zone and forced six turnovers as part of a 28-6 win over the Raiders. Similarly, Atlanta had yet to yield a touchdown, and received 100-yard rushing games from Warrick Dunn (134 yards) and Michael Vick (127) in beating Tampa Bay, 14-3. The Jaguars, meanwhile, blanked the defending Super Bowl champion Steelers, 9-0, as Josh Scobee kicked second-half field goals of 31, 32, and 42 yards.

San Diego and Chicago were doubly dominant. The Chargers racked up 476 total yards and came within two minutes of their second straight shutout in downing the Titans, 40-7, while the Bears, with four TD passes from Rex Grossman, maintained control from start to finish in a 34-7 taming of the Lions.



Andy Lyons/Getty Images

◀ **MAKING THE BROWNS BLUE. Rudi Johnson's two fourth-quarter TD runs helped the Bengals top Cleveland.**



Elsa/Getty Images

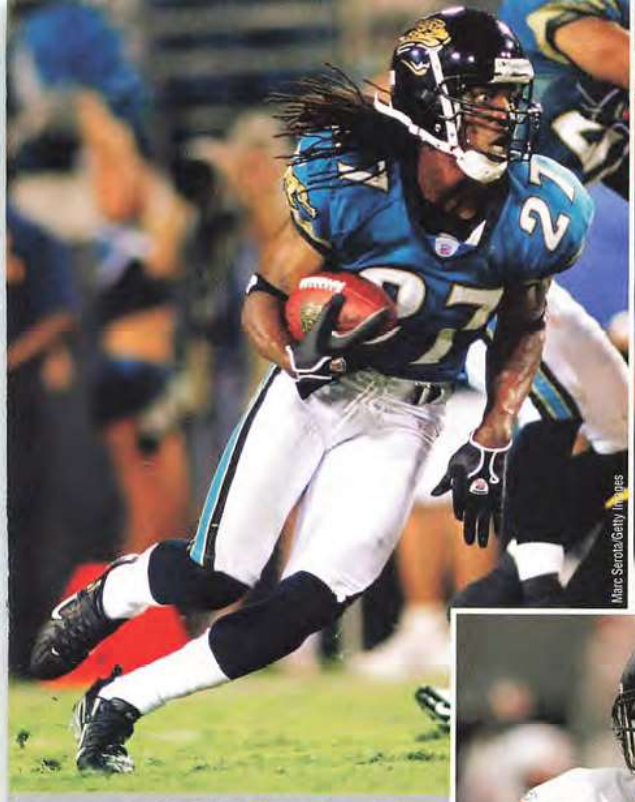
▲ **SMOOTH SAILING. Drew Brees threw for 353 yards and two TDs as the Saints beat Green Bay to climb to 2-0.**

A GIANT FINISH

Perhaps motivated by the "must win" tag attached to their Week Two game in Philadelphia, the Giants staged a furious comeback to stun the Eagles, 30-24, in overtime and avoid an 0-2 start. QB Eli Manning (31-of-43, 371 yards) rallied his squad from 17 points down, throwing a 22-yard TD pass to Amani Toomer late in the fourth quarter and then launching a game-winning 31-yard toss to Plaxico Burress with 3:11 left in the extra session. "I was tired. I was telling myself, 'One more play,'" said Burress, who finished with six catches for 114 yards. The Eagles were in control, 17-7, at halftime and extended the lead on Donovan McNabb's 23-yard TD pass to Reggie Brown on the opening drive of the third quarter. Things stood that way until the final period when Tim Carter recovered a Burress fumble in the end zone that pulled New York within 24-14. After Toomer's scoring catch, Jay Feely kicked a 35-yard field goal to force OT. "This one will be something to remember," said Giants coach Tom Coughlin.

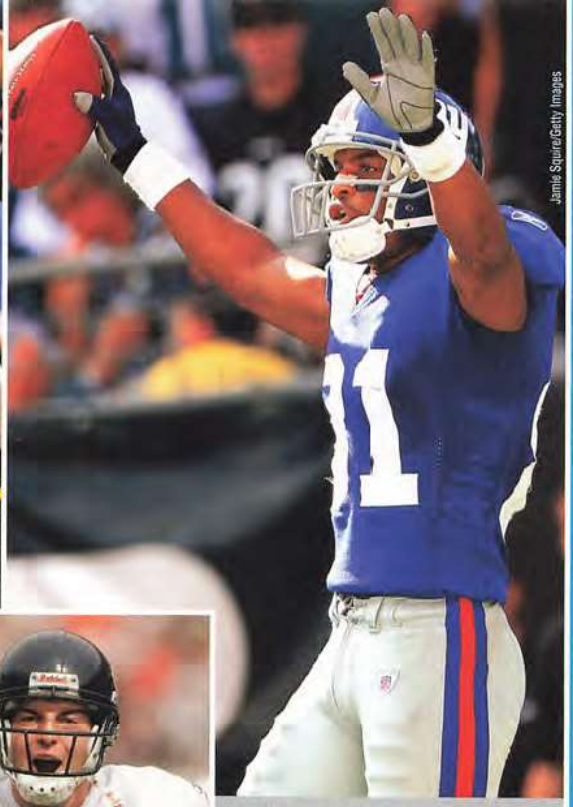
"MEET ME IN THE END ZONE."

~WR Antonio Bryant, speaking to teammates in the huddle moments before catching a 72-yard TD pass in the 49ers' 20-13 win over the Rams.



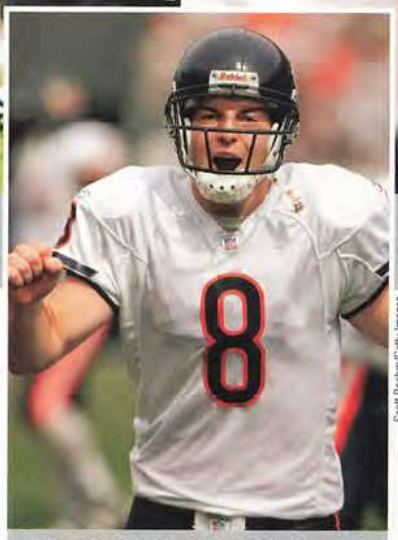
Marc Serota/Getty Images

▲ A SUPER SHUTOUT. Rashean Mathis collected a pair of interceptions in the Jaguars' blanking of Pittsburgh.



Jamie Squire/Getty Images

▲ HERE WE COME. Amani Toomer's touchdown catch keyed the Giants' late rally against Philadelphia.

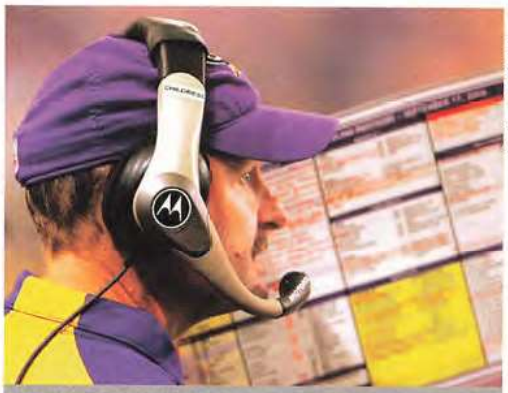


Scott Boehm/Getty Images

▲ BULLISH BEAR. Quarterback Rex Grossman directed Chicago's victory over Detroit.

KEEPING 'EM CLOSE

Minnesota won its second straight nail-biter over a 2005 playoff team, this time clipping the Carolina Panthers, 16-13, in overtime. Finding himself in the middle of it all was Ryan Longwell, who kicked three field goals and threw a game-tying touchdown pass. Facing a 13-6 deficit midway through the final quarter, the Vikings lined up for a 33-yard FG, but holder Chris Kluwe instead flipped the ball to Longwell, who rolled right and floated a 16-yard pass to Richard Owens for the score. "Ten years in, I finally got one," joked Longwell, who became the second player in NFL history to both throw a fourth-quarter TD pass and kick the winning field goal in the same game (George Blanda was the first in 1970). Setting the stage for the heroics was Vikings special teamer Jason Glenn, who four plays earlier pounced on a mishandled punt return at the Panthers 21-yard line. Chester Taylor rushed for 113 yards in the win, including a 33-yard dash on the overtime drive that set up Longwell's final field goal.



Lisa Blumenfeld/Getty Images

▲ CHILDRESS' PLAY. The Vikings made it two in a row for first-year head coach Brad Childress by edging Carolina.

SECOND LOOKS

Seattle and New England also were among those improving to 2-0. The defending NFC champion Seahawks struck for two first-quarter touchdowns, one on Shaun Alexander's 2-yard run, and went on to defeat the Cardinals, 21-10. For the Patriots, Corey Dillon and Laurence Maroney each scored on short runs as New England built a big lead before holding on for a 24-17 victory over the Jets…Buffalo collected seven sacks—three by Ryan Denney—and had a shutout intact until the final two minutes of a 16-6 win at Miami…Denver kept a second straight opponent out of the end zone, but still needed three Jason Elam field goals—including a 39-yarder in overtime—to edge Kansas City, 9-6…Frank Gore rushed for 127 yards and Alex Smith threw a 72-yard touchdown pass to Antonio Bryant as the 49ers clipped the Rams, 20-13…Terry Glenn could count a 40-yard TD reception among his six catches in Dallas' 27-10 win over Washington.

WEEK 2

ONE GAME.
ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, SEPT. 17

@ Atlanta 14 ..... Tampa Bay 3
@ Baltimore 28 ..... Oakland 6
Buffalo 16 ..... @ Miami 6
@ Chicago 34 ..... Detroit 7
@ Cincinnati 34 ..... Cleveland 17
@ Denver 9 ..... Kansas City 6 (OT)
@ Indianapolis 43 ..... Houston 24
@ Minnesota 16 ..... Carolina 13 (OT)
@ New England 24 ..... N.Y. Jets 17
New Orleans 34 ..... @ Green Bay 27
N.Y. Giants 30 ... @ Philadelphia 24 (OT)
@ San Diego 40 ..... Tennessee 7
@ San Francisco 20 ..... St. Louis 13
@ Seattle 21 ..... Arizona 10
@ Dallas 27 ..... Washington 10

MONDAY, SEPT. 18

@ Jacksonville 9 ..... Pittsburgh 0

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Peyton Manning (QB, Colts): Posted a 129.3 passer rating after completing 26 of 38 passes for 400 yards and three TDs in win over the Texans.

DEFENSE

Rashean Mathis (CB, Jaguars): Intercepted two passes, defensed two others, and was part of an effort that didn't allow a rushing first down while shutting out Pittsburgh.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Coy Wire (S, Bills): Blocked a punt that led to a FG and had a special teams tackle as part of win at Miami.

OFFENSE

Eli Manning (QB, Giants): In leading comeback win over the Eagles, totaled 371 passing yards, and went 20 of 26 for 233 yards and two TDs in fourth quarter and overtime.

DEFENSE

Tommie Harris (DT, Bears): Part of a stellar defensive effort, contributing two sacks and five tackles overall in victory over Detroit.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Ryan Longwell (K, Vikings): Kicked three field goals—from 22, 27, and the game-winner from 19 yards—and also threw a touchdown pass to help defeat the Panthers.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Manny Lawson (LB, 49ers): Three tackles, two sacks, and a pair of QB pressures in win over the Rams.

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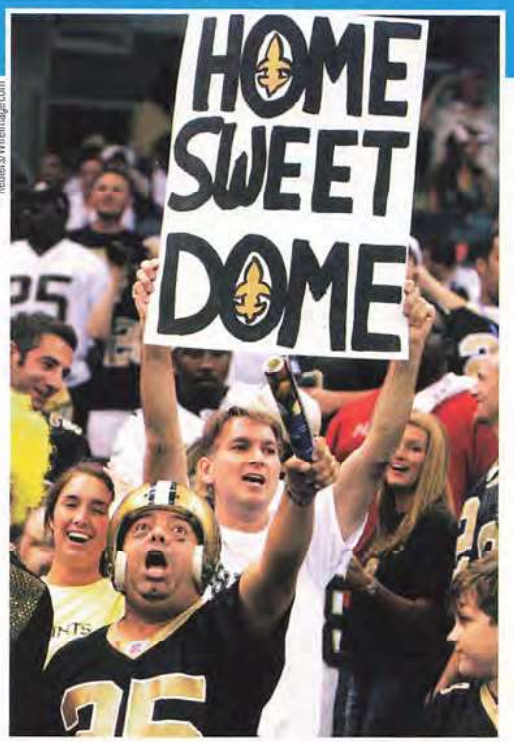
WEEK 3 SAINTS LEAD PARADE OF UNBEATENS

EVEN THOUGH SIX TEAMS IMPROVED TO 3-0, THE WEEK'S SPOTLIGHT WAS SHINING SQUARELY ON NEW ORLEANS, WHERE THE SAINTS RETURNED TO THE SUPERDOME FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE BEING DISPLACED BY HURRICANE KATRINA.

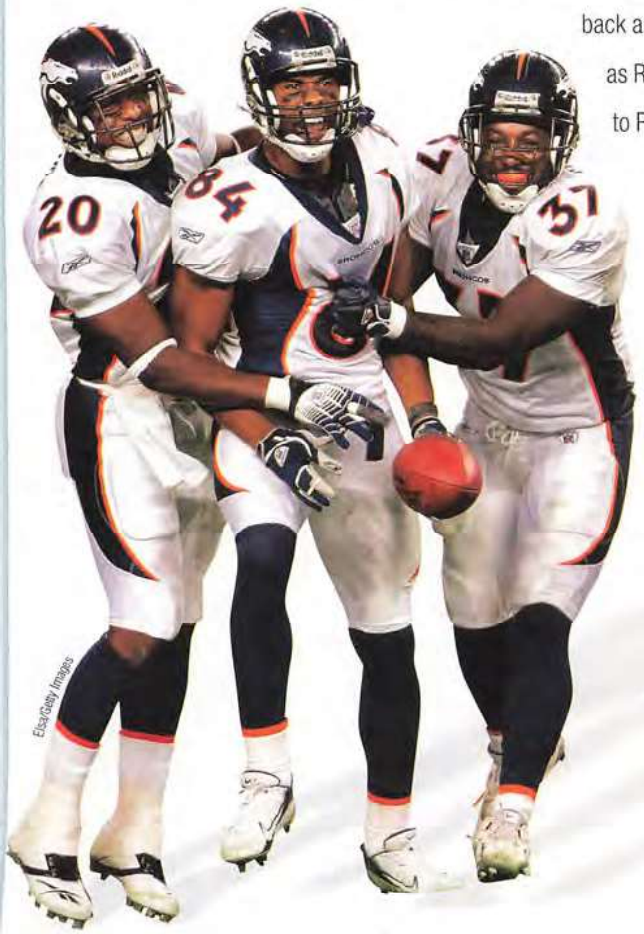


Reuters/Wireimage.com

The team's return provided an emotional shot in the arm to the still-rebuilding city, and a stadium crowd of 70,003 was treated to a 23-3 victory over the Falcons that pushed the Saints to the top of the NFC South. Prior to kickoff, fans heard live performances by U2 and Green Day while former President Bush did the pregame coin toss. Afterward, appreciative team members dedicated a game ball to the entire city. "The Saints have been a unifying force in New Orleans for 40 years now," said executive vice president of administration Rita Benson LeBlanc. "We are proud to use this occasion to announce to the world that New Orleans is open for business."

Setting the tone was Steve Gleason, who blocked a Falcons punt that Curtis Deloatch recovered in the end zone for a Saints touchdown less than two minutes into the game. Devery Henderson scored on an 11-yard double-reverse—a play dubbed "The Superdome Special"—and John Carney kicked three field goals, including a 51-yarder as the first half expired that made it 20-3. The win gave the franchise its best start since 2002.

Yet New Orleans was not alone in staying perfect. The Bears beat back a challenge from Minnesota, 19-16, as Rex Grossman threw a late TD pass to Rashied Davis, while the Seahawks overwhelmed the Giants, 42-30, behind five Matt Hasselbeck touchdown passes. Over in the AFC, the Bengals, Colts, and Ravens each won their third straight game, while 2-0 San Diego had a bye week.


Elsa/Getty Images

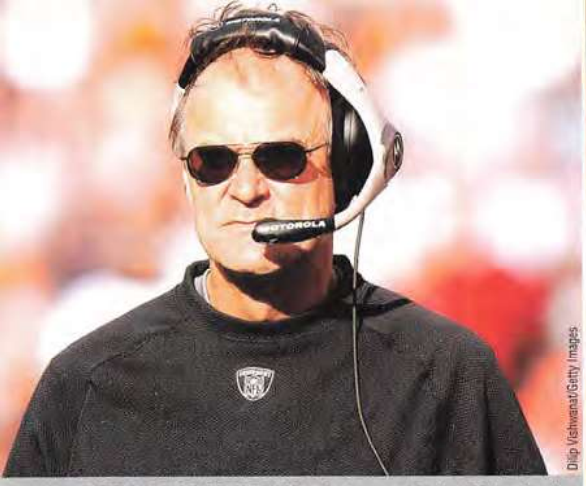
◀ **BRONCOS BUSTIN' OUT. Mike Bell (l), Javon Walker, and Cecil Sapp enjoy a Denver TD against the Patriots.**

A WEEK OF RECORDS...

Brett Favre became the second NFL quarterback to throw 400 TD passes, reaching the milestone with a 75-yard toss to Greg Jennings in the Packers' victory at Detroit. "We needed a win a lot more than I needed 400 touchdown passes," said Favre, who later added two more scoring throws to help new head coach Mike McCarthy gain his first victory. It took Favre 228 games to reach the mark, one more than Dan Marino, whose 420 passing TDs are a league record. More than 1,100 miles south, Mark Brunell made history of his own, setting the NFL standard for consecutive completions in a game (22) during the Redskins' win at Houston. He topped the mark of Rich Gannon (21) on a 6-yard pass to Santana Moss. "It's a nice honor, but the credit should go to the 11 guys on the field," said Brunell. "That's an offensive team record, really. The receivers were in the right spots, the offensive line did great."

"FROM THE MOMENT I SIGNED WITH THE SAINTS, I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS. IT WAS A GREAT NIGHT. IT'S SOMETHING WE'LL NEVER FORGET."

~QB Drew Brees, on the Saints' first game in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina.



Dilip Vishwanat/Getty Images

▲ LOTS TO RAVE ABOUT. With a last-second win at Cleveland, head coach Brian Billick had Baltimore off to a 3-0 start.

Tom Szczerbowski/US Presswire

▲ THE FAB 400. Brett Favre celebrates with running back Noah Herron after throwing his 400th career TD pass.

Robert B. Stanton/WireImage.com

▲ EAST-TO-WESTBROOK. Brian Westbrook's three TDs at San Francisco helped Philadelphia grab the NFC East lead.

...AND OF REMATCHES

Eight months after being knocked out early on in a Wild Card playoff loss to the Steelers, Carson Palmer was around to perform a bit of fourth-quarter magic against the Bengals' AFC North rival, throwing a pair of late touchdown passes to T.J. Houshmandzadeh to key a 28-20 victory. "I didn't take anything personal into this game," insisted Palmer, who also connected with Chris Henry for a pair of scores. "I didn't come in here thinking, 'It's payback time, let's get these guys.' I came in here thinking it's a divisional game and let's get a win." Cincinnati's defense forced five turnovers, the last one coming on Kevin Kaesviharn's interception that stopped Pittsburgh's drive for a potential tying score. In Foxborough, Denver and New England met for the first time since the Broncos' home triumph in the 2005 AFC Divisional Playoffs. Though a different venue, it was the same outcome as Jake Plummer threw scoring passes of 83 and 32 yards to Javon Walker that helped produce a 17-7 victory. Just as impressive was the Broncos' defense, which extended its streak of not allowing a touchdown to 11 quarters before Tom Brady hooked up with Doug Gabriel on an 8-yard score for the game's final points. The win was Denver's fifth in the last six meetings between the teams.

WEEK THREE-PEATS

Morten Andersen kicked for the Falcons against the Saints, making the 46-year-old the second-oldest player to appear in an NFL game. Andersen accounted for Atlanta's only points with a 26-yard field goal in the first quarter...Brian Westbrook scored three times and 292-pound defensive tackle Mike Patterson returned a fumble 98 yards for a TD as Philadelphia won in San Francisco, 38-24... Among those making clutch kicks in Week Three were Matt Stover and John Kasay. Stover's 52-yard FG with 24 seconds remaining allowed the Ravens to overcome Cleveland, 15-14, while Kasay hit a 46-yard field goal with two seconds to play as the Panthers nipped Tampa Bay, 26-24...The Jets' defense allowed 475 yards, but gave up just 13 points on five drives inside their 30-yard line, leading to a 28-20 victory over the Bills...The NFL announced that the Patriots and Seahawks would travel to Beijing for an exhibition game on August 9, 2007, as part of the one-year countdown to the start of the 2008 Olympic Games in China.

WEEK 3

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, SEPT. 24

Baltimore 15.....@ Cleveland 14
Carolina 26.....@ Tampa Bay 24
Chicago 19.....@ Minnesota 16
Cincinnati 28.....@ Pittsburgh 20
Green Bay 31.....@ Detroit 24
Indianapolis 21.....@ Jacksonville 14
@ Miami 13.....Tennessee 10
N.Y. Jets 28.....@ Buffalo 20
Philadelphia 38..@ San Francisco 24
St. Louis 16.....@ Arizona 14
@ Seattle 42.....N.Y. Giants 30
Washington 31.....@ Houston 15
Denver 17.....@ New England 7

MONDAY, SEPT. 25

@ New Orleans 23.....Atlanta 3

Open Dates: Dallas, Kansas City, Oakland, San Diego

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

T.J. Houshmandzadeh (WR, Bengals): Playing for first time in 2006, had nine receptions, including two TDs in the fourth quarter that sparked a comeback win at Pittsburgh.

DEFENSE

Kerry Rhodes (S, N.Y. Jets): Made 10 tackles, including two sacks, and forced a pair of fumbles (one that was returned for a TD) in win at Buffalo.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Terrence Wilkins (PR-WR, Colts): Had 82-yard punt return for a TD for Indy's first score in win over the Jaguars.

OFFENSE

Brett Favre (QB, Packers): Completed 25 of 36 passes for 340 yards and three TDs, including the 400th TD pass of his career, in win over Detroit.

DEFENSE

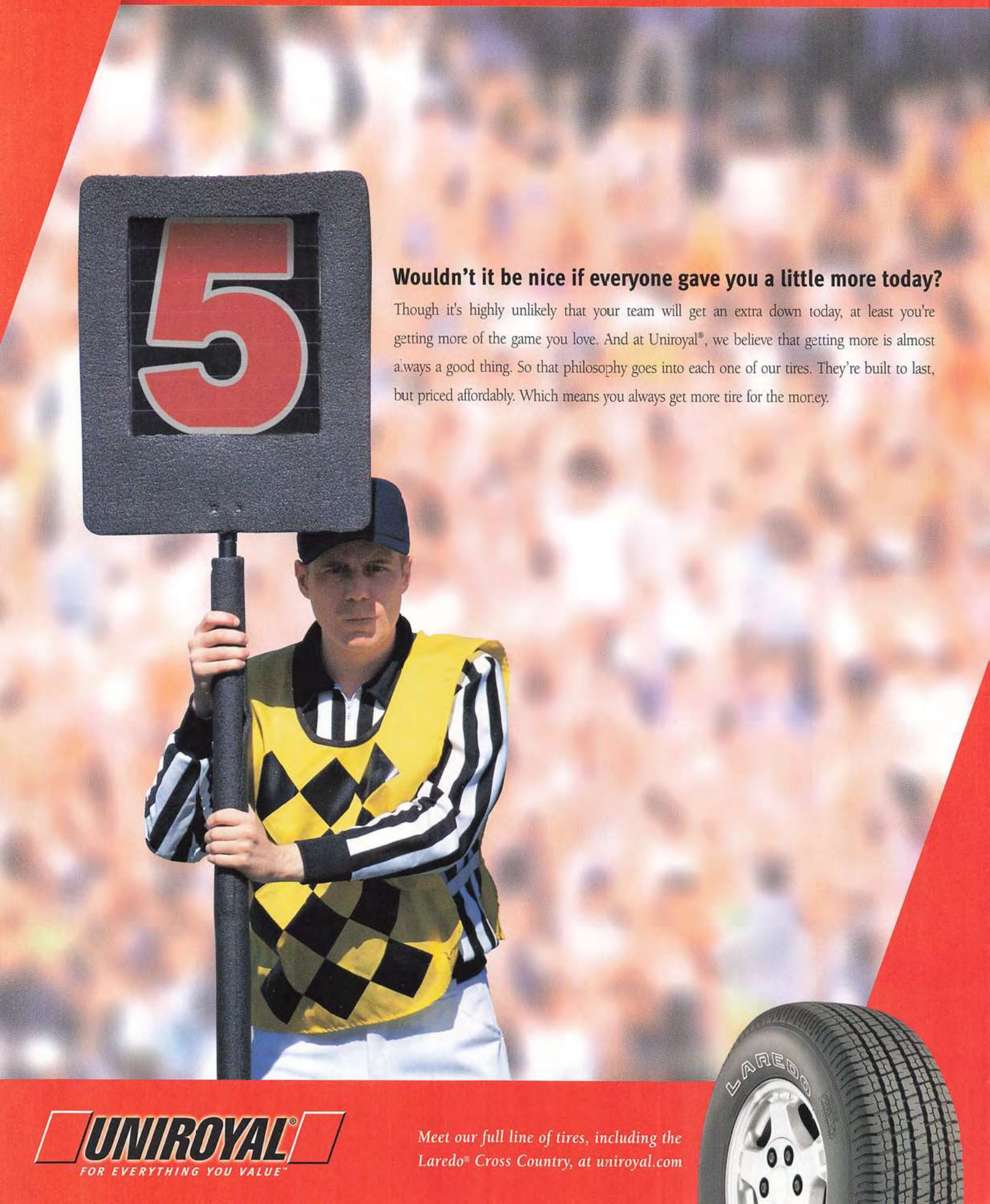
Scott Fujita (LB, Saints): Led solid defensive effort with eight tackles, one sack, and a forced fumble in home victory over Atlanta.

SPECIAL TEAMS

John Kasay (K, Panthers): Became first NFL player to make four field goals of at least 46 yards in a game (51, 50, 49, 46), the final one earning a last-second win at Tampa Bay.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Greg Jennings (WR, Packers): Caught three passes for 101 yards and a touchdown in victory over the Lions.



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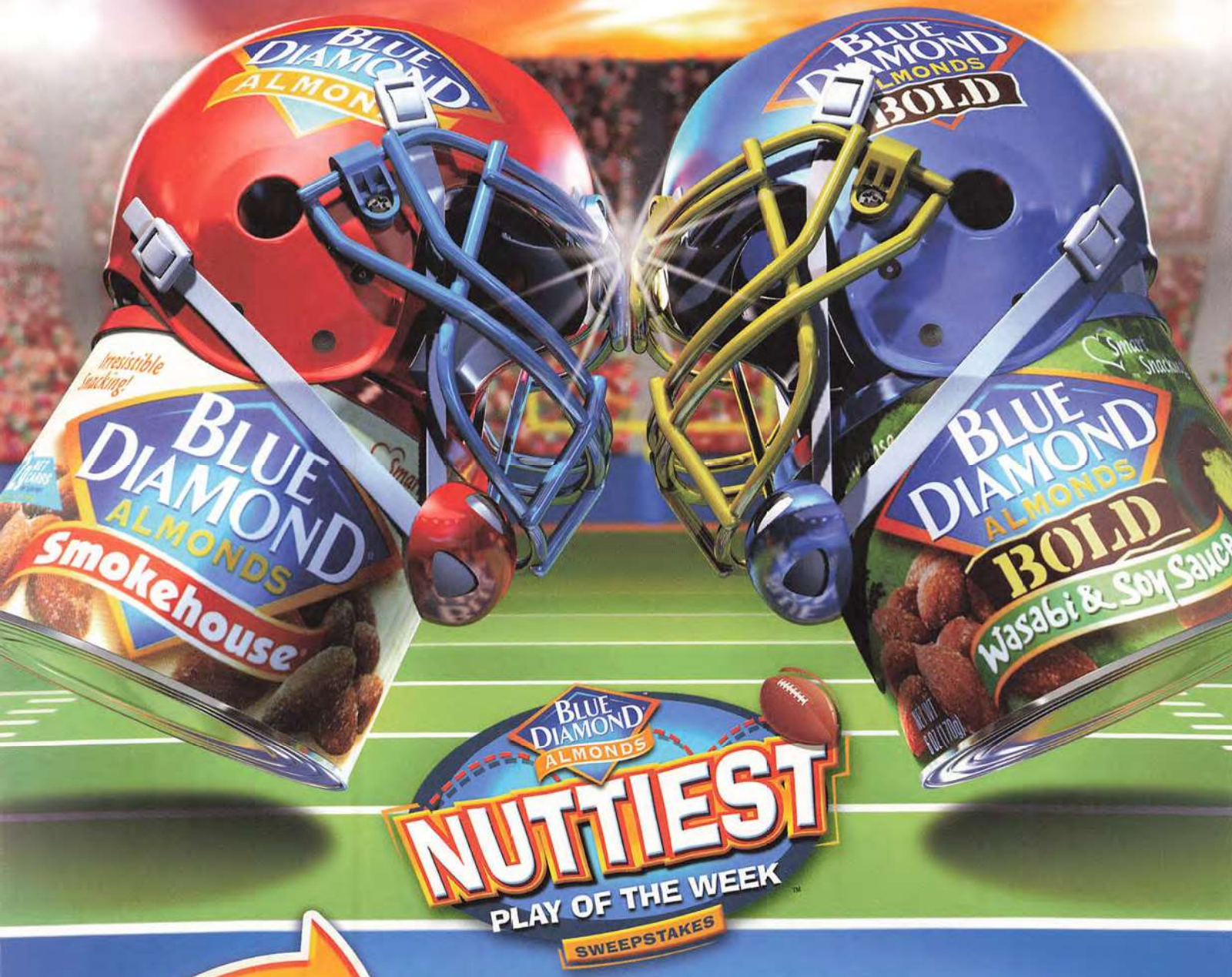
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WEEK 4 MANY CLOSE CALLS; THREE STAND TALL

EDGE-OF-YOUR-SEAT ENDINGS FUELED WEEK FOUR: EIGHT GAMES DECIDED BY A TOUCHDOWN OR LESS, THREE WHERE THE WINNING POINTS WERE SCORED IN THE FINAL MINUTES, AND ONE THAT HAD A SENSATIONAL OVERTIME FINISH.

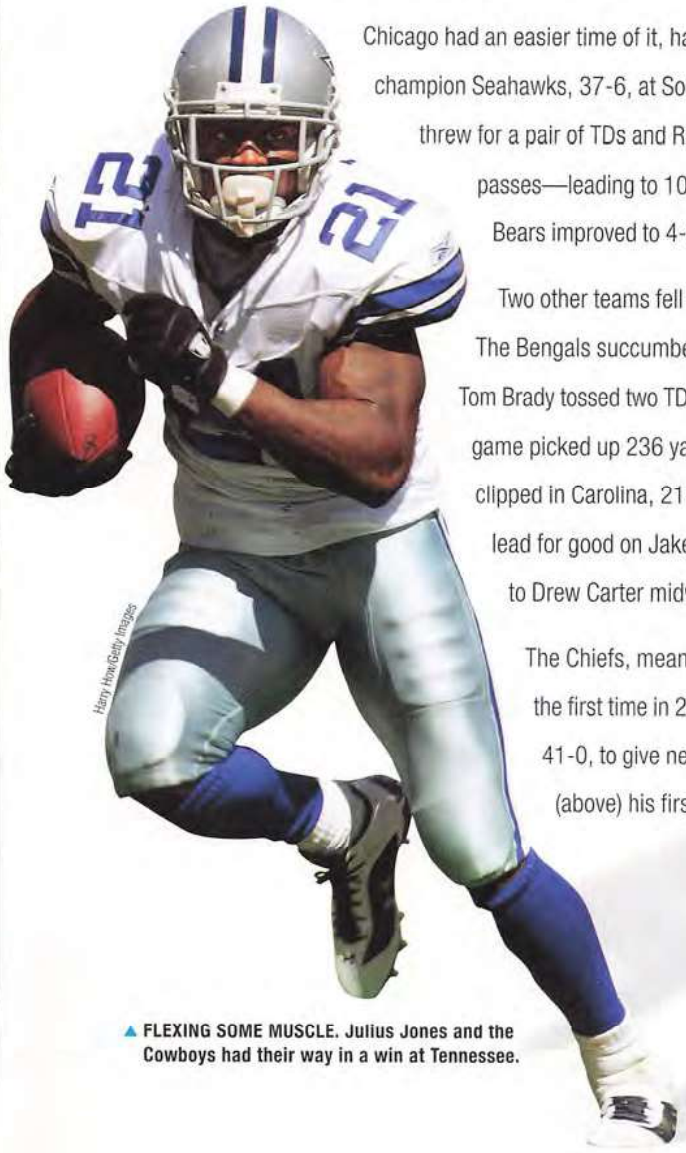
Peter Aiken/Wirelmage.com

By the time it was over, just three teams—the Ravens, Colts, and Bears—remained perfect on the season. Baltimore prevailed on Steve McNair's 10-yard touchdown pass to Todd Heap with 34 seconds remaining to knock off previously undefeated San Diego, 16-13. It marked the second straight last-minute triumph for the AFC North leaders. Indianapolis found itself trailing the Jets after Justin Miller returned a kickoff 103 yards for a TD, but Peyton Manning—who earlier threw his 250th career touchdown pass—answered with a game-winning drive, scoring on a 1-yard plunge with 50 seconds to go that lifted the Colts to a 31-28 victory.

Chicago had an easier time of it, handling the defending NFC champion Seahawks, 37-6, at Soldier Field. Rex Grossman threw for a pair of TDs and Rick Manning Jr. picked off two passes—leading to 10 second-quarter points—as the Bears improved to 4-0 for the first time since 1991.

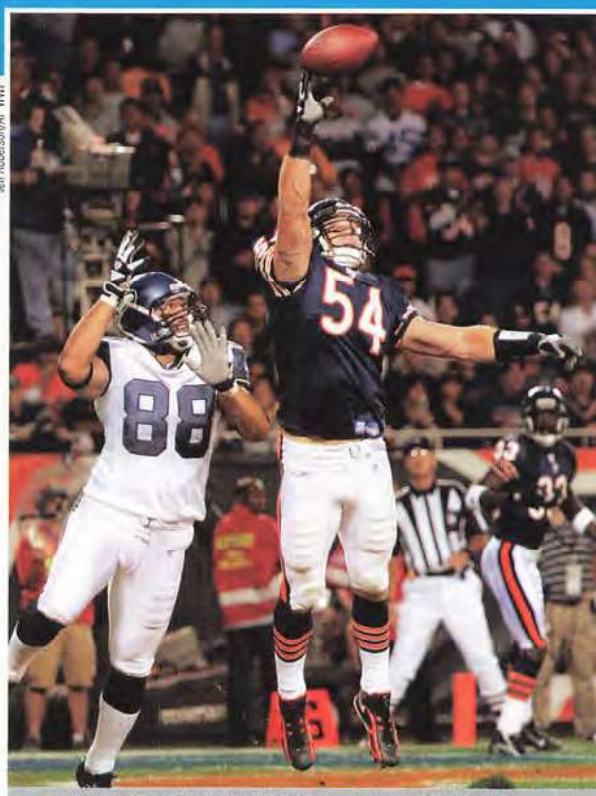
Two other teams fell from the ranks of the unbeaten. The Bengals succumbed to New England, 38-13, as Tom Brady tossed two TD passes and the Patriots ground game picked up 236 yards, while the Saints were clipped in Carolina, 21-18. The Panthers took the lead for good on Jake Delhomme's 4-yard TD pass to Drew Carter midway through the fourth quarter.

The Chiefs, meanwhile, hit the win column for the first time in 2006, shutting out the 49ers, 41-0, to give new head coach Herm Edwards (above) his first victory with the team.



Harry How/Getty Images

▲ **FLEXING SOME MUSCLE. Julius Jones and the Cowboys had their way in a win at Tennessee.**



Jeff Roberson/AP WWP

▲ **POWER TIPPING. Brian Urlacher (No. 54) and the Bears staked their claim in the NFC by beating Seattle, 37-6.**

RUNNING FALCONS TAKE FLIGHT

Two team bedrocks—an impressive ground game and standout defense—were at the root of Atlanta's 32-10 decision over Arizona that pushed the Falcons to 3-1. For the third time in four games, the defense didn't allow a touchdown, though it did score one on DeAngelo Hall's 36-yard interception return in the third quarter that broke the game open. That was one of four turnovers forced by Atlanta, which also got a pickoff from Michael Boley and a pair of fumble recoveries by Rod Coleman. Michael Vick rushed for 101 yards, the seventh 100-yard game of his career, as the Falcons churned out 262 yards on the ground. Jerious Norwood scored the game's final TD on a 78-yard run and, just for good measure, Morten Andersen kicked five field goals. "We're right where we need to be," said tight end Alge Crumpler, who made two catches in the win.

"I SAW THAT PEYTON MANNING SCORED, SO I HAD TO OUTDO HIM."

~Eagles QB Donovan McNabb, after rushing for two TDs in a win over Green Bay.

LITTLE BOOKS BIG GAINS

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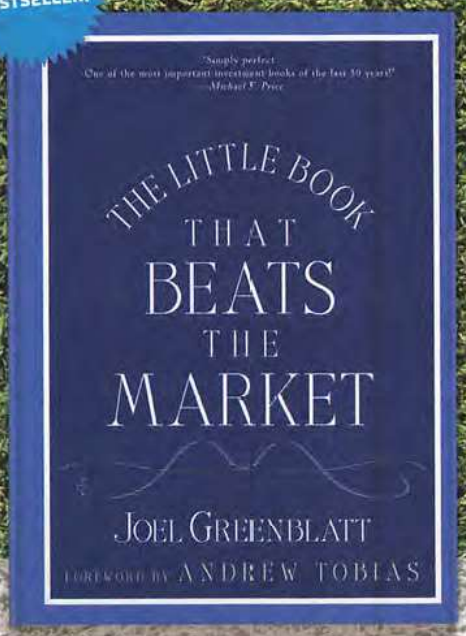

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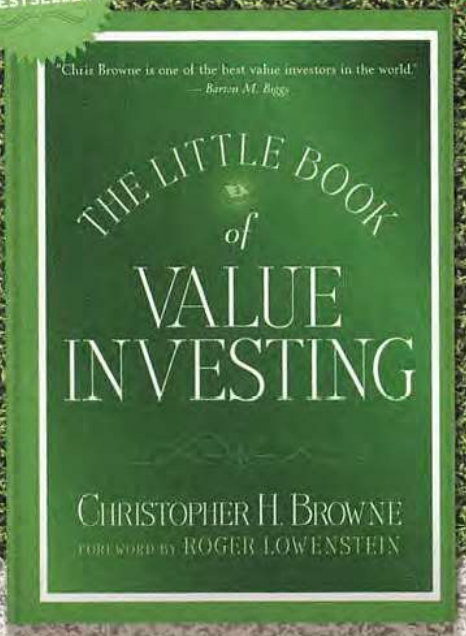

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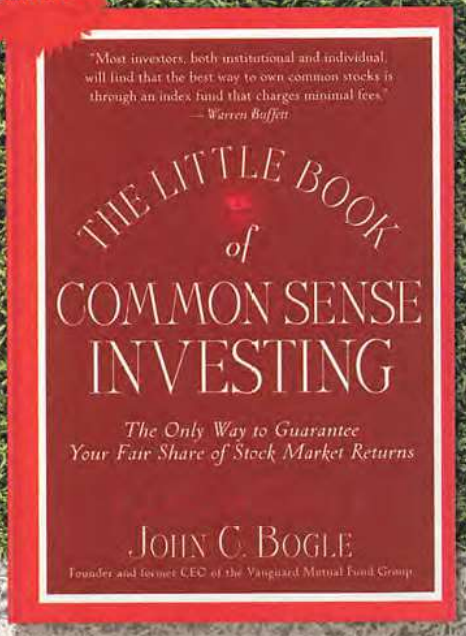
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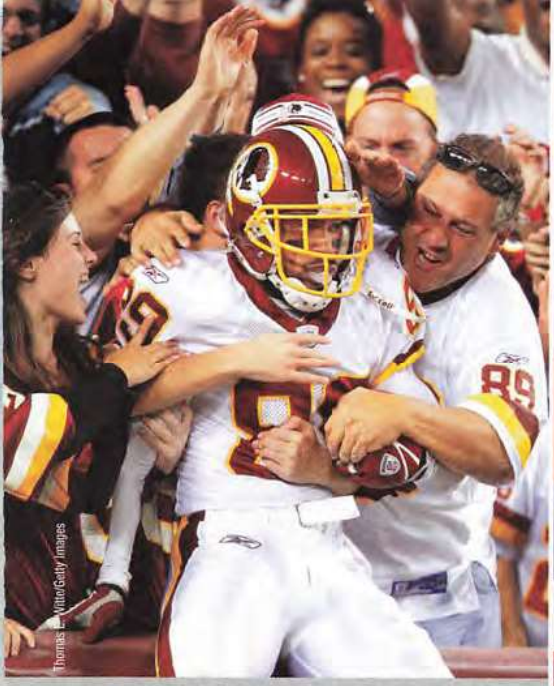
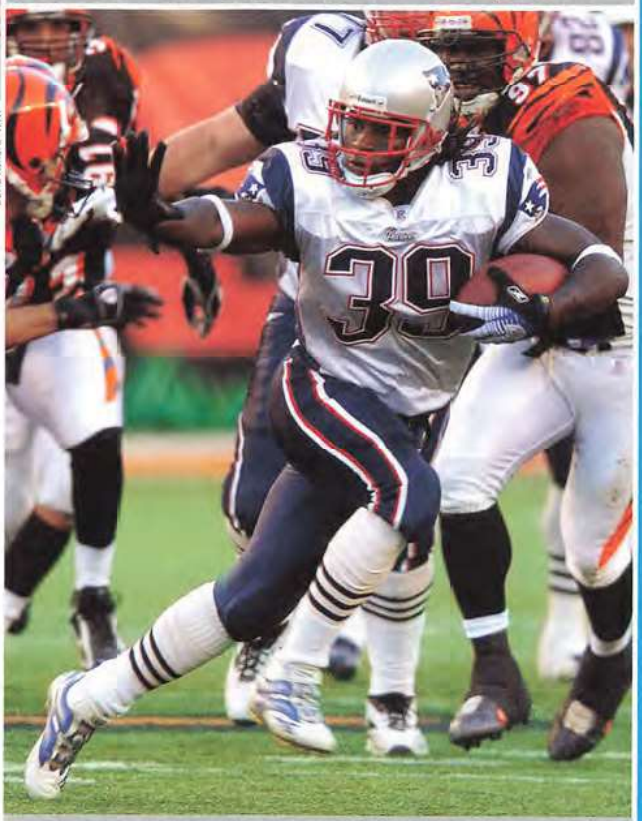


Thomas E. White/Getty Images

▲ STATE OF EUPHORIA. Santana Moss celebrates with Redskins fans after his game-winning TD.

Dilip Vishwanat/Getty Images

▲ MARC ON THE MARK. Marc Bulger passed for 328 yards and threw TDs to three different players in St. Louis' 41-34 victory at Detroit.



David Koh/AP WWP

▲ BACK OFF, BENGAL. Laurence Maroney (125 rushing yards, two TDs) fends off a would-be tackler during the Patriots' win at Cincinnati.

DOUBLE DOSE OF DRAMA

Santana Moss' third TD reception of the day—a 68-yard catch and run from Mark Brunell—lifted Washington over the Jaguars, 36-30, in overtime. Earlier, Moss scored on grabs of 55 and 8 yards, but Jacksonville forced the extra period on Josh Scobee's 41-yard FG with six seconds remaining. On the third play of OT, Moss caught a short pass along the left sideline, then spun free from defenders Deon Grant and Brian Williams and sprinted for the winning score. "I attacked the ball and I saw him [Grant] try to attack me, and he missed," said Moss. "The rest was a blur." In St. Louis, the game's sixth and final lead change came on Marc Bulger's 6-yard TD pass to Isaac Bruce with 1:56 to go, catapulting the Rams past Detroit, 41-34. Kevin Jones' 7-yard run put the Lions in front, 34-30, early in the fourth quarter, before Jeff Wilkins got the Rams within one on a 46-yard FG. "Sometimes in a game like this, it's who gets the ball last," said Bulger, who extended his streak of passes without an interception to 186. Detroit's final drive reached the Rams' 36 before ending on downs.

WEEK FOUR FODDER

Cleveland won its first game of the year, rallying from an 18-point deficit to beat the Raiders, 24-21. Charlie Frye threw three touchdown passes, the last one a 5-yarder to Joe Jurevicius in the third quarter that put the Browns ahead. Two other comebacks fell just short: Buffalo slipped past Minnesota, 17-12, when time expired with the Vikings driving at the Bills' 16-yard line; meanwhile, the Texans gave head coach Gary Kubiak his first win, stopping a two-point conversion pass with 1:39 remaining to hold off the Dolphins, 17-15…Donovan McNabb (16-of-30, 288 yards) threw two second-half TD passes to Greg Lewis and ran for scores from 6 and 15 yards as the Eagles handled Green Bay, 31-9, making the Packers winless in nine trips to Philly since 1962… Terry Glenn's two touchdown catches and Julius Jones' 122 rushing yards backboned Dallas' 45-14 triumph over Tennessee…Nine of the weekend's 14 winning teams scored at least 30 points.

WEEK 4

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, OCT. 1

@ Atlanta 32.....Arizona 10
@ Baltimore 16.....San Diego 13
@ Buffalo 17.....Minnesota 12
@ Carolina 21.....New Orleans 18
Cleveland 24.....@ Oakland 21
Dallas 45.....@ Tennessee 14
@ Houston 17.....Miami 15
Indianapolis 31.....@ N.Y. Jets 28
@ Kansas City 41.....San Francisco 0
New England 38.....@ Cincinnati 13
@ St. Louis 41.....Detroit 34
@ Washington 36..Jacksonville 30 (OT)
@ Chicago 37.....Seattle 6

MONDAY, OCT. 2

@ Philadelphia 31.....Green Bay 9

Open Dates: Denver, N.Y. Giants, Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE
Andre Johnson (WR, Texans): Caught nine passes for 101 yards, including a 30-yard reception and 6-yard TD in fourth quarter of win over Miami.

DEFENSE
Jarvis Green (DE, Patriots): Collected three sacks and forced and recovered a fumble that led to a touchdown in victory at Cincinnati.

SPECIAL TEAMS
Joshua Cribbs (KR-WR, Browns): Had a pair of big kickoff returns—of 65 and 53 yards—that led to 10 points in comeback win against the Raiders.

OFFENSE
Santana Moss (WR, Redskins): Made four catches—three that went for touchdowns—for 138 yards in OT victory against Jacksonville.

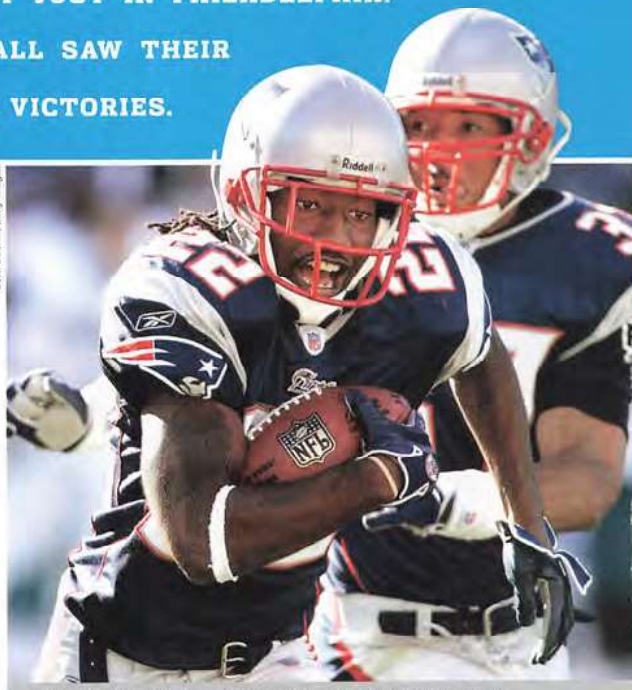
DEFENSE
Tommie Harris (DT, Bears): Totaled five tackles, two sacks (for 20 yards in losses), and four quarterback hurries in win over the Seahawks.

SPECIAL TEAMS
Morten Andersen (K, Falcons): The 46-year-old became oldest player ever win to NFL weekly honors after kicking five field goals (34, 40, 36, 26, and 28 yards) in win over Arizona.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE
Laurence Maroney (RB, Patriots): Rushed for 125 yards, scoring on runs of 11 and 25 yards, at Cincinnati.

WEEK 5 FORTUNES REVERSED BY BIG RETURNS

RETURNS WERE THE WEEK'S DOMINANT THEME—AND NOT JUST IN PHILADELPHIA. FANS OF THE SAINTS, VIKINGS, PANTHERS, AND 49ERS ALL SAW THEIR TEAMS UTILIZE VARIOUS KINDS OF RETURNS TO REGISTER VICTORIES.



Scott Boehm/Getty Images

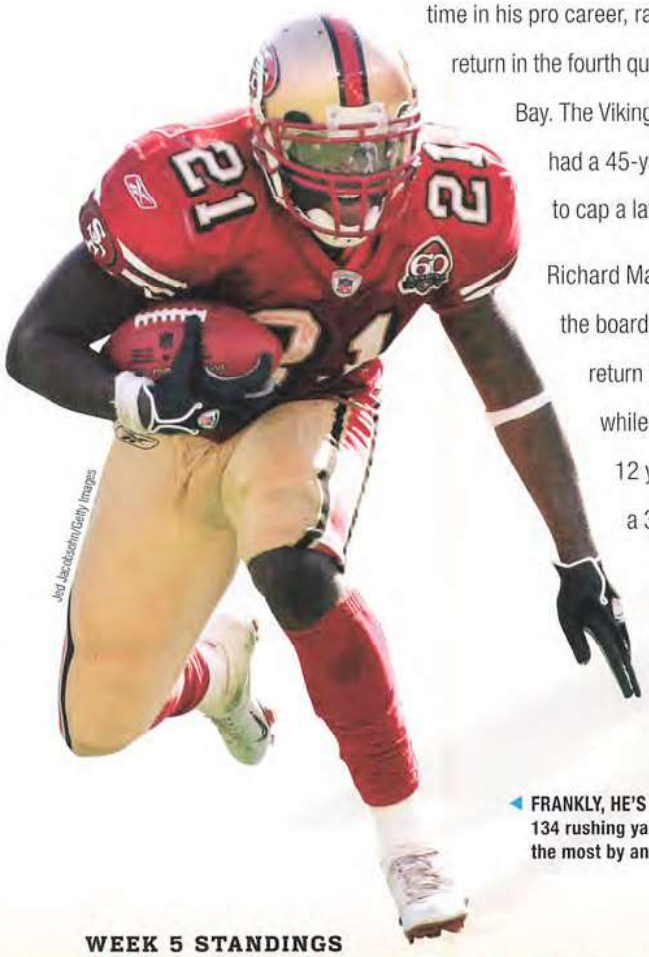
▲ **TAKE YOUR PICK. Asante Samuel heads upfield with one of his two interceptions in the Patriots' 20-10 win over Miami.**

The Eagles prevailed in an NFC East showdown with the Cowboys, 38-24. While the game's buildup centered on the return of Terrell Owens to Philadelphia, it was Lito Sheppard's return—he brought back an interception 102 yards in the final minute of play to halt a Dallas scoring bid—that mattered most. Philly had taken the lead earlier in the fourth quarter, when Donovan McNabb lobbed a 40-yard touchdown pass to Reggie Brown off a flea-flicker.

The Saints' Reggie Bush reached the end zone for the first time in his pro career, racing 65 yards with a punt return in the fourth quarter of 24-21 win over Tampa Bay. The Vikings' E.J. Henderson, meanwhile, had a 45-yard interception return for a TD to cap a late rally that stunned Detroit.

Richard Marshall put the Panthers on the board with his 30-yard interception return in a victory over the Browns, while the 49ers' Melvin Oliver ran 12 yards with a fumble for a TD in a 34-20 triumph over Oakland.

The list of unbeatens lost another member when the Broncos edged the Ravens, 13-3, on Monday night.



Jed Jacobsohn/Getty Images

◀ **FRANKLY, HE'S FIRST. Frank Gore's 134 rushing yards vs. Oakland were the most by any back in Week 5.**

THEN THERE WERE TWO

With five weeks complete, Chicago and Indianapolis stood as the NFL's last two unbeaten teams, though they accomplished the feat in markedly different ways. The Bears overwhelmed Buffalo, 40-7, breaking the game open with three TDs in a nine-minute span of the second quarter. Chicago's defense forced five turnovers and limited the Bills to 145 total yards. "Anytime you execute like that—offense, defense, special teams—it's so much fun," said QB Rex Grossman, who threw for 182 yards and three touchdowns. The Colts needed to rally in the second half to trip up Tennessee, 14-13. Peyton Manning's 2-yard scoring pass to Reggie Wayne with 5:10 to play, followed by Martin Gramatica's extra point, proved to be the difference. Marvin Harrison, who scored Indy's first TD, set the record for consecutive games with a reception to start an NFL career (159).

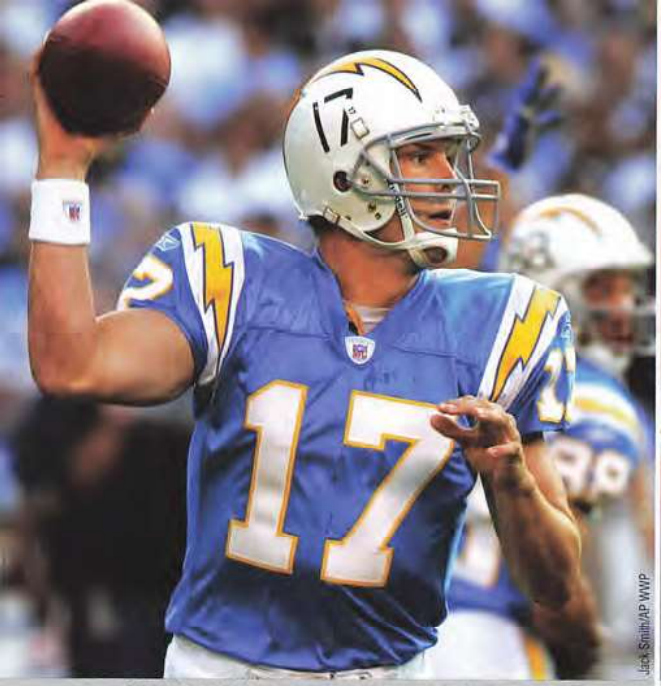
WEEK 5 STANDINGS

AFC EAST	W-L-T	PF	PA
New England	4-1-0	108	74
Buffalo	2-3-0	77	105
N.Y. Jets	2-3-0	96	132
Miami	1-4-0	61	91
AFC NORTH	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Baltimore	4-1-0	89	46
Cincinnati	3-1-0	98	85
Pittsburgh	1-3-0	61	77
Cleveland	1-4-0	81	109

AFC SOUTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
Indianapolis	5-0-0	135	100
Jacksonville	3-2-0	118	74
Houston	1-3-0	66	113
Tennessee	0-5-0	60	135
AFC WEST	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Denver	3-1-0	49	34
San Diego	3-1-0	103	36
Kansas City	2-2-0	80	52
Oakland	0-4-0	47	113

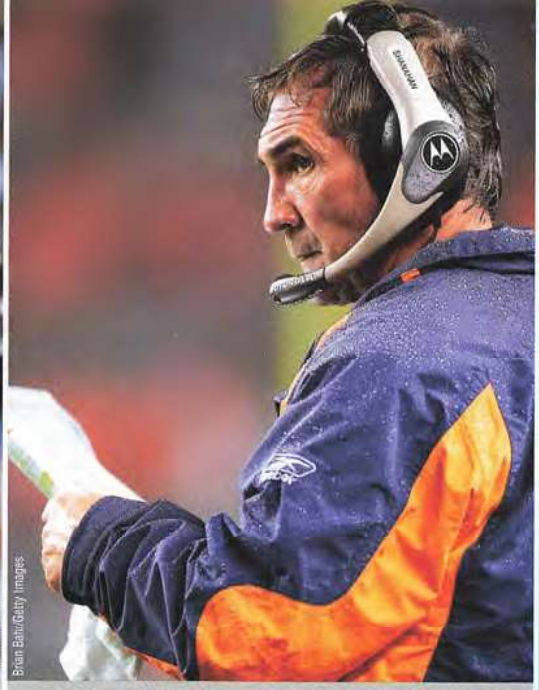
NFC EAST	W-L-T	PF	PA
Philadelphia	4-1-0	155	97
Dallas	2-2-0	113	86
N.Y. Giants	2-2-0	100	95
Washington	2-3-0	96	110
NFC NORTH	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Chicago	5-0-0	156	36
Minnesota	3-2-0	89	82
Green Bay	1-4-0	87	138
Detroit	0-5-0	88	141

NFC SOUTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
New Orleans	4-1-0	118	86
Atlanta	3-1-0	69	42
Carolina	3-2-0	86	90
Tampa Bay	0-4-0	48	91
NFC WEST	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
St. Louis	4-1-0	111	98
Seattle	3-1-0	78	83
San Francisco	2-3-0	105	146
Arizona	1-4-0	88	119



Jack Smith/AP WWP

▲ **BOLTING BACK. Adorned in a throwback Chargers uniform, Philip Rivers threw for a pair of TDs in a win over Pittsburgh.**



Brian Bahr/Getty Images

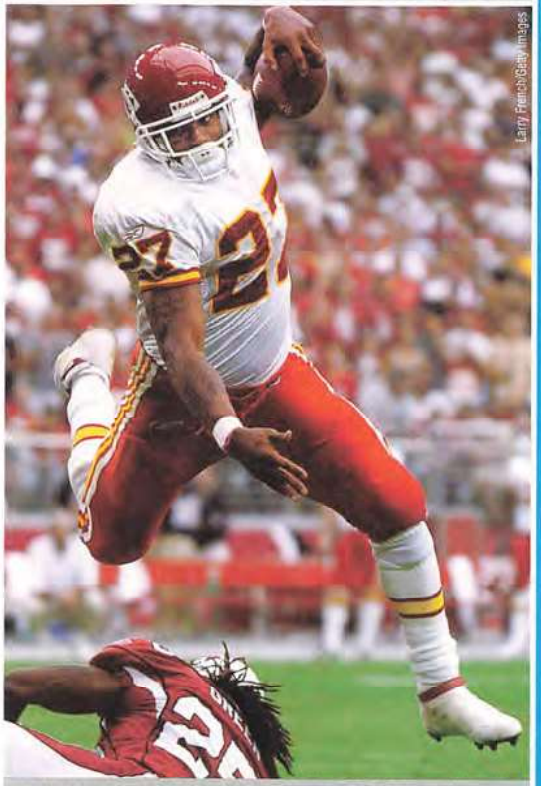
▲ **REIGNING IN THE RAIN. Head coach Mike Shanahan looks on as the Broncos deal the Ravens their first loss of 2006.**

ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The western division races began to take shape with St. Louis atop the NFC West, and San Diego and Denver sharing the AFC West lead. The Rams held off host Green Bay, 23-20, to move in front of idle Seattle. Two Marc Bulger TD passes and three Jeff Wilkins field goals gave St. Louis a 10-point lead, but Brett Favre made things close by throwing a 44-yard scoring pass to Greg Jennings and then driving the Packers to the Rams' 11 in the final minute of play. That's where defensive end Leonard Little forced a fumble that teammate Jerametrius Butler recovered to preserve the win. "It rolled and it seemed like it took forever, like the ball was going in slow motion," said Little. "I was just hoping that someone would jump on it, and hopefully it would be one of our guys." In San Diego, the Chargers kept pace with Denver by defeating the Steelers, 23-13. Drayton Florence's third-quarter interception proved key, as it stopped a Pittsburgh threat and set up the go-ahead drive. Philip Rivers marched the Chargers 91 yards in 10 plays, capped by a 22-yard pass to Antonio Gates. Nate Kaeding then made fourth-quarter field goals from 33 and 22 yards to pad the lead. "It was a little more than a win," said Rivers, who completed 24 of 37 passes for 242 yards. "We grew a lot as a team."

TAKE FIVE

Seven teams rebounded from halftime deficits to win and four rallied after trailing in the fourth quarter. One of those was Kansas City, which scored 13 late points to edge Arizona, 23-20. Damon Huard started the comeback with a 15-yard TD pass to Samie Parker, and Lawrence Tynes followed with field goals from 40 and 19 yards, the latter coming with 1:36 to play. The Cardinals had led, 14-0, on Matt Leinart's first-quarter touchdown throws to Anquan Boldin and Larry Fitzgerald...The Patriots turned three turnovers into 13 points and held the ball for the game's final six minutes to gain a 20-10 victory over Miami...Jay Feely kicked four field goals and Plaxico Burress caught a 2-yard TD from Eli Manning as the Giants beat the Redskins, 19-3...Fred Taylor rushed for 111 yards, Maurice Jones-Drew had a pair of TD runs, and the Jaguars' defense picked off three passes as part of a 41-0 triumph over the Jets.



Larry French/Getty Images

▲ **PLAYING CATCH(UP). Larry Johnson had six receptions, including a 9-yard TD, as Kansas City rallied past Arizona.**

WEEK 5

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, OCT. 8

@ Carolina 20.....Cleveland 12
@ Chicago 40.....Buffalo 7
@ Indianapolis 14.....Tennessee 13
@ Jacksonville 41.....N.Y. Jets 0
Kansas City 23.....@ Arizona 20
@ Minnesota 26.....Detroit 17
@ New England 20.....Miami 10
@ New Orleans 24.....Tampa Bay 21
@ N.Y. Giants 19.....Washington 3
@ Philadelphia 38.....Dallas 24
St. Louis 23.....@ Green Bay 20
@ San Francisco 34.....Oakland 20
@ San Diego 23.....Pittsburgh 13

MONDAY, OCT. 9

@ Denver 13.....Baltimore 3

Open Dates: Atlanta, Cincinnati, Houston, Seattle

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Damon Huard (QB, Chiefs): Rallied Kansas City to victory at Arizona by completing 26 of 38 passes for 288 yards and two touchdowns.

DEFENSE

Jamal Williams (DT, Chargers): Six tackles, including one sack and a tackle behind the line of scrimmage, to fuel a victory over Pittsburgh.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Lawrence Tynes (K, Chiefs): Kicked three field goals—from 45, 40, and 19 yards—and scored 11 of team's 23 points in win over Arizona.

OFFENSE

Frank Gore (RB, 49ers): Rushed for 134 yards, averaging 5.0 yards per carry, and caught three passes to help beat the Raiders.

DEFENSE

Lito Sheppard (CB, Eagles): Sparked win over Dallas with eight tackles, seven passes defensed, and a pair of interceptions, one he returned 102 yards for the game-clinching score.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Reggie Bush (RB-PR, Saints): Had a 65-yard fourth-quarter punt return for a TD that provided winning points in victory over Tampa Bay.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Hank Baskett (WR, Eagles): Three receptions for 112 yards, including an 87-yard TD, in triumph over Dallas.

WEEK 6 STILL UNBEATEN, BUT JUST BEAR-LY

OF ALL THE STORIES THAT UNFOLDED IN WEEK SIX, THE MOST AMAZING MAY HAVE TAKEN PLACE ON MONDAY NIGHT. THE BEARS, AFTER BEING DOMINATED BY ARIZONA FOR NEARLY THREE QUARTERS, STAGED A STUNNING RALLY TO WIN.

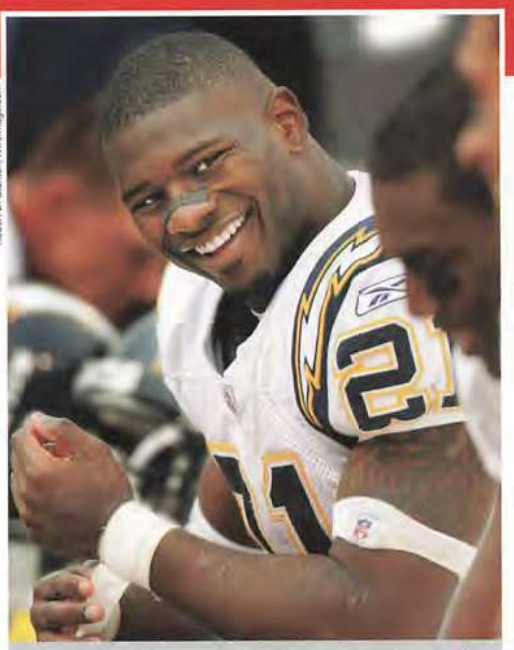
For a while it was the Cardinals that looked unbeatable, as they jumped to a 23-3 lead much to the delight of a spirited crowd enjoying the team's first *Monday Night Football* appearance since 1999. Two Matt Leinart touchdown passes and three Neil Rackers field goals provided that cushion, before the momentum swung as Chicago returned a pair of fumbles for TDs and Devin Hester sprinted 83 yards with a punt return that put the Bears ahead, 24-23, with 2:58 to go. Leinart responded by driving Arizona into field goal range, but Rackers' 40-yard bid was off the mark, allowing the Bears (6-0) to continue their best start in two decades. The game was one of eight on the weekend decided by three points or less.

The defending champion Steelers and their Super Bowl XL opponent, the Seahawks, turned in clutch efforts of their own. Ben Roethlisberger broke out of an early-season funk with a 16-of-19, 238-yard performance as Pittsburgh handled the Chiefs, 45-7, while Seattle grabbed the NFC West lead from St. Louis when Josh Brown's 54-yard field goal at the final gun capped a 30-28 thriller.

San Diego was the week's highest-scoring team, outpointing the 49ers, 48-19. LaDainian Tomlinson rushed for a franchise-record four TDs and Philip Rivers passed for 334 yards as the Chargers remained even with Denver atop the AFC West.

Scott Boehm/Getty Images

◀ **COMEBACK COMPLETE. Devin Hester returns a punt for the winning score to cap Chicago's rally against Arizona.**



Robert B. Stanton/Wirelmage.com

▲ **FOUR AGAINST 49ERS. LaDainian Tomlinson is all smiles after scoring four touchdowns against San Francisco.**

DOMINATING "D" IN DENVER

The Broncos sent historians scrambling after their 13-3 victory over the Raiders. In improving to 4-1, Denver became the first NFL team since 1934 to allow just one touchdown in its first five games. "I know it hasn't happened in a while," said safety John Lynch, who made five tackles in the win. "One touchdown in five games is pretty darn good." Denver stopped two drives deep into its territory—Champ Bailey intercepted a pass at the 1-yard line just before halftime and Michael Myers recovered a fumble to end an Oakland threat in the fourth quarter. The Broncos' points came from Jason Elam, who kicked field goals of 51 and 22 yards, and Tatum Bell, whose 2-yard touchdown run in the first quarter started the scoring. Bell finished with 83 rushing yards. Although Denver's offense was averaging just 12.4 ppg through five games, quarterback Jake Plummer was confident. "The offense will come," he predicted. "We have [head coach] Mike Shanahan, one of the best offensive minds in football."

"I TRIED THROWING TO THE GUYS IN THE BLACK SHIRTS RATHER THAN THE GUYS IN THE WHITE SHIRTS."

~Ben Roethlisberger, on overcoming a slow start in 2006 by throwing two TDs and no interceptions in Pittsburgh's win over the Chiefs.

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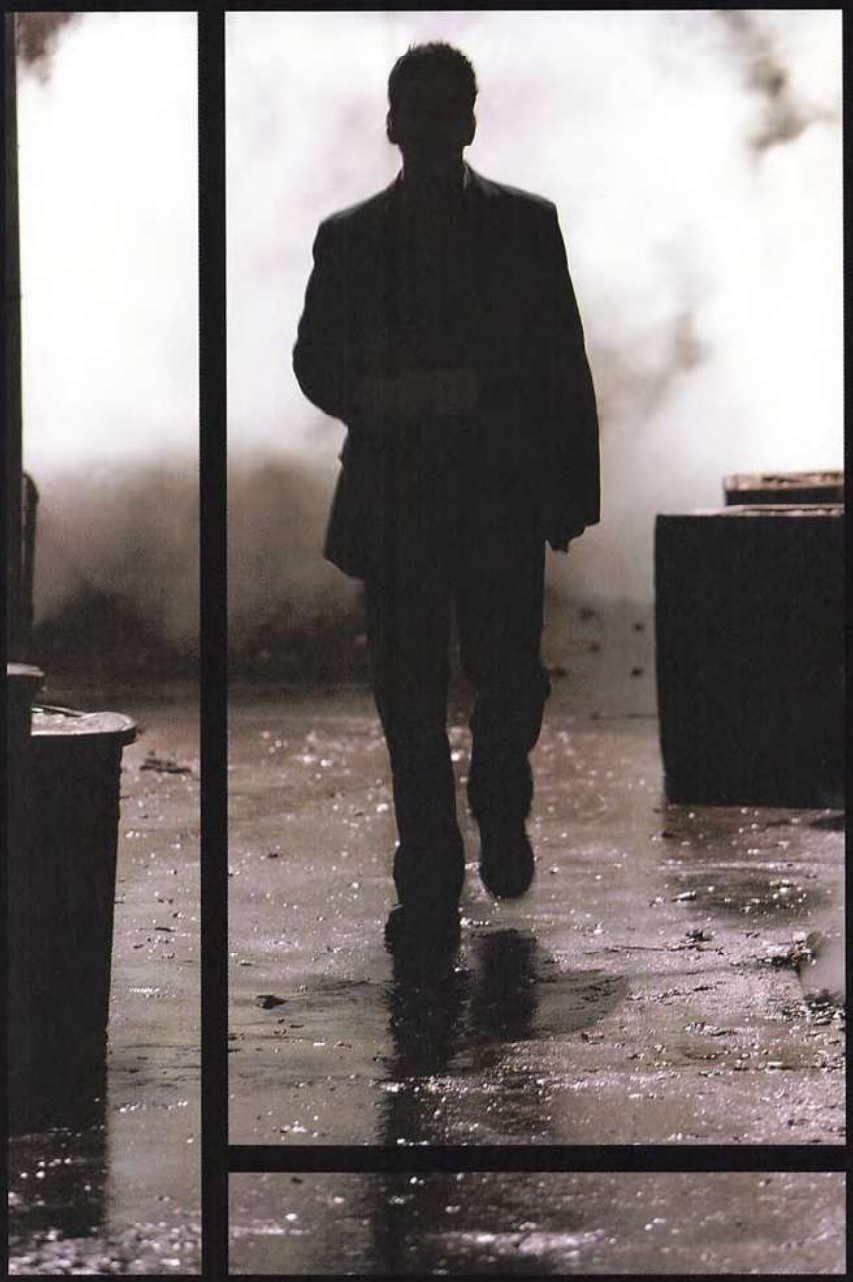

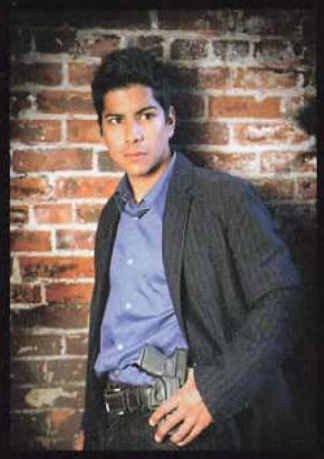

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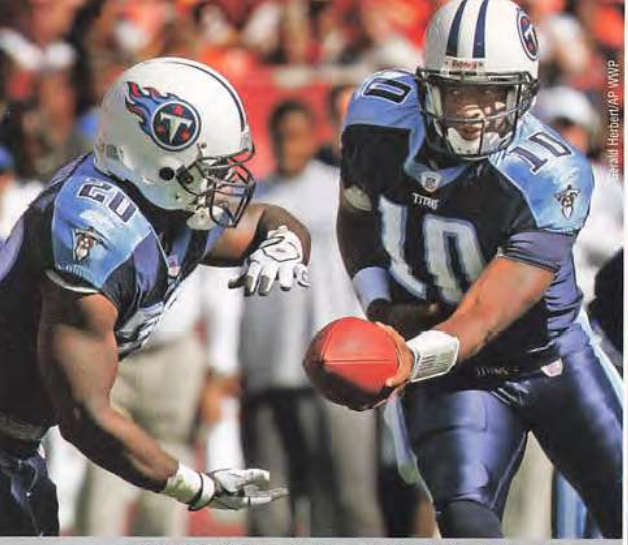
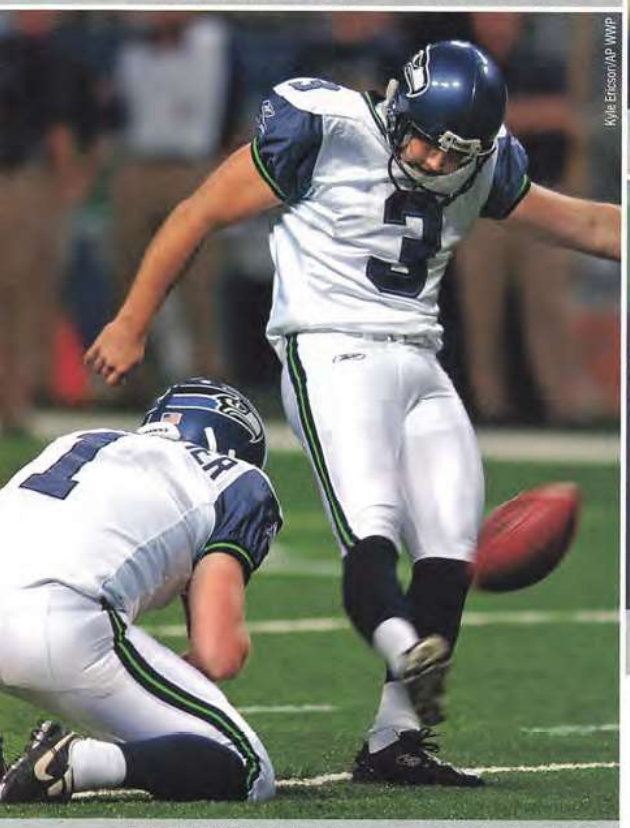


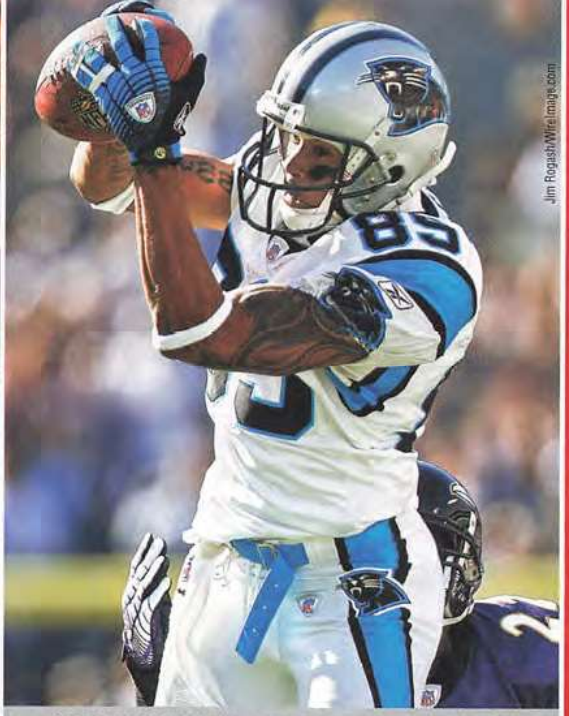
Sarah Hebert/AP WWP

▲ TITANIC EFFORT. Travis Henry (left) gets the ball from Vince Young on his way to a 178-yard rushing day for Tennessee.



Kyle Ericson/AP WWP

▲ AND AWAY IT GOES. Josh Brown launches his 54-yard field goal that lifted Seattle past St. Louis in an NFC West battle.



Jim Rogash/WireImage.com

▲ CAROLINA CLUTCH. Steve Smith hauls in one of his eight receptions during the Panthers' victory at Baltimore.

Bill Kostroun/AP WWP

▲ THE JETS' PILOT. Head coach Eric Mangini instructs Eric Smith (No. 33) during New York's 20-17 win over Miami.

THREE FOR ONE

Tampa Bay, Tennessee, and Detroit recorded their first wins of the year with the Buccaneers and Titans beating playoff teams from 2005. Michael Clayton's lunging 8-yard TD reception with 35 seconds to play lifted Tampa Bay past Cincinnati, 14-13. "It was our time," said Clayton. "This team has been through so much." The win snapped the Bengals' eight-game winning streak against NFC opponents. Travis Henry's 178 rushing yards and Rob Bironas' tie-breaking 30-yard field goal with 5:11 remaining pushed Tennessee past the Redskins, 25-22, while the Lions' Roy Williams caught 10 passes, including a 28-yard TD, and Kevin Jones rushed for 127 yards in a 20-17 triumph over Buffalo. One factor in the outcome was that Detroit outscored the Bills in the fourth quarter. The Lions had been outscored, 47-14, in the final quarter of the season's first five games. "These things are big because every week it comes down to this," said Detroit head coach Rod Marinelli.

SIXTH SENSE

New Orleans remained atop the NFC South by edging the Eagles, 27-24. The Saints held the ball for the final 8:26 to set up John Carney's 31-yard field goal as time expired...Dallas and the N.Y. Giants pulled closer to the NFC East lead. Terrell Owens caught three TD passes as the Cowboys erupted for 31 unanswered points in a 34-6 win over Houston. The Giants also came on strong, scoring the game's final 24 points to top the Falcons, 27-14...Carolina won its fourth straight, tipping the Ravens, 23-21. Jake Delhomme threw TD passes of 72 yards to Steve Smith and 42 yards to Drew Carter in the victory.

WEEK 6

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, OCT. 15

Carolina 23.....@ Baltimore 21
@ Dallas 34.....Houston 6
@ Detroit 20.....Buffalo 17
@ New Orleans 27 ....Philadelphia 24
N.Y. Giants 27.....@ Atlanta 13
@ N.Y. Jets 20 .....Miami 17
@ Pittsburgh 45.....Kansas City 7
San Diego 48 .....@ San Francisco 19
Seattle 30.....@ St. Louis 28
@ Tampa Bay 14 .....Cincinnati 13
Tennessee 25 .....@ Washington 22
@ Denver 13.....Oakland 3

MONDAY, OCT. 16

Chicago 24 .....@ Arizona 23

Open Dates: Cleveland, Green Bay, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Minnesota, New England

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Philip Rivers (QB, Chargers): Notched first 300-yard passing game of career (334 yards) and finished with a 116.8 passer rating in victory over 49ers.

DEFENSE

Troy Polamalu (S, Steelers): Big part of defensive effort to beat Chiefs, with 10 tackles, three passes defensed, and an interception.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Casey Cramer (TE, Titans): Blocked a punt for a safety and made three special teams tackles in helping Titans defeat Washington.

OFFENSE

Tiki Barber (RB, Giants): Shredded the league's top-ranked rush defense for 185 yards and added three pass receptions in victory at Atlanta.

DEFENSE

James Hall (DE, Lions): Keyed defense with 3.5 sacks (for 30.5 yards lost), seven tackles, two QB hits, and a forced fumble in win vs. Buffalo.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Josh Brown (K, Seahawks): Became first player in NFL history to kick three FGs of at least 49 yards in the fourth quarter of a game, including game-winning 54-yarder vs. Rams.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Santonio Holmes (WR, Steelers): Amassed 180 total yards, including 58 on two catches, in win over Chiefs.

WEEK 7

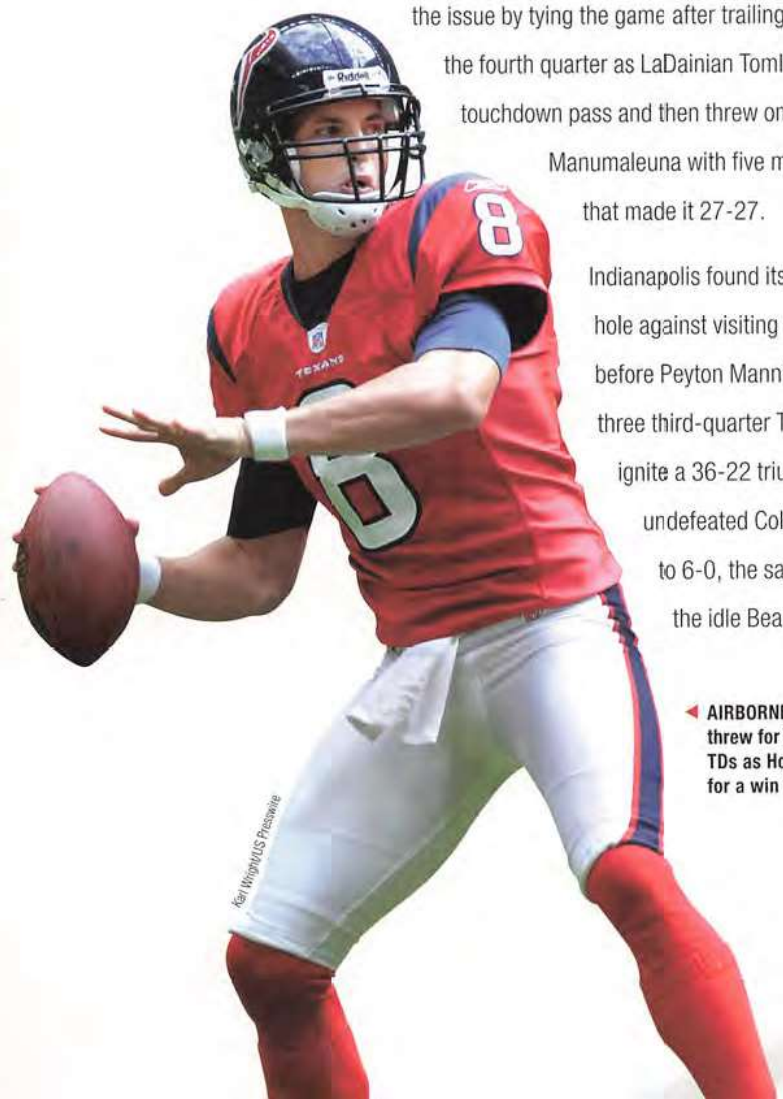
FALCONS FASHION AN OVERTIME VICK-TORY

ATLANTA PREVAILED IN ONE OF THE SEASON'S MOST ENTERTAINING AFFAIRS, DEFEATING THE STEELERS, 41-38. THE CLASH FEATURED SIX LEAD CHANGES AND SAW BOTH TEAMS WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO WIN IN THE FINAL MINUTE OF REGULATION.

Michael Vick fired four touchdown passes for the Falcons, three of those to tight end Alge Crumpler. But Pittsburgh's Hines Ward caught three TDs of his own, the last a 17-yarder from Charlie Batch with 3:19 remaining that tied the game. Both teams would miss field goal attempts down the stretch, before Atlanta took possession in the extra period and drove deep into Steelers' territory—aided by a 26-yard Vick to Crumpler completion—setting up the ageless Morten Andersen to kick the 32-yard game-winner.

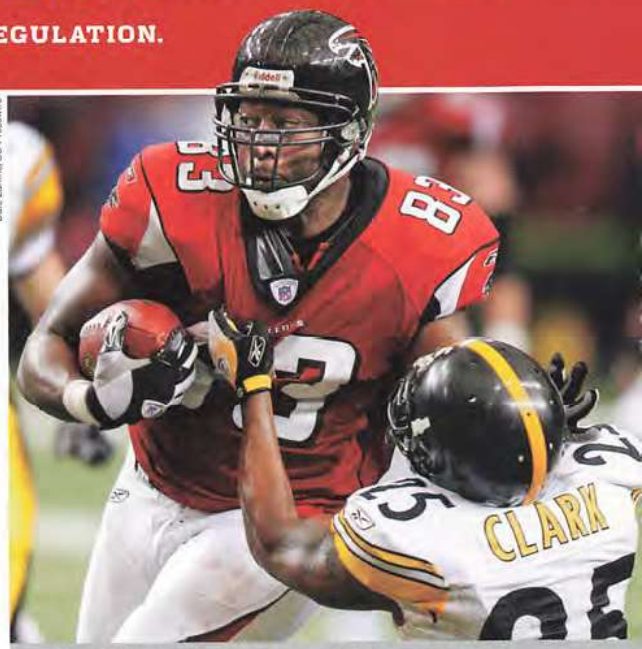
Dramatic endings defined the weekend. Matt Bryant drilled the third-longest field goal in NFL history, a 62-yarder as time expired, lifting the Buccaneers to a 23-21 win over Philadelphia. The Eagles had rallied from a 17-point deficit and took the lead in the final minute of play on Brian Westbrook's 52-yard TD reception. In Kansas City, Lawrence Tynes made a 53-yard field goal to lift the Chiefs past San Diego, 30-27. The Chargers forced the issue by tying the game after trailing by 14 points in the fourth quarter as LaDainian Tomlinson caught a touchdown pass and then threw one to Brandon Manumaleuna with five minutes to play that made it 27-27.

Indianapolis found itself in a halftime hole against visiting Washington before Peyton Manning erupted with three third-quarter TD passes to ignite a 36-22 triumph. The undefeated Colts improved to 6-0, the same record as the idle Bears.



Kari Wright/US Presswire

◀ **AIRBORNE CARR. David Carr threw for 224 yards and two TDs as Houston pulled away for a win over Jacksonville.**



Dale Zanine/US Presswire

▲ **A FIRM GRIP. Alge Crumpler is tackled after making one of his six catches during the Falcons' win against Pittsburgh.**

EASTERN ELITES

Defending champions owned or shared the lead in seven of the NFL's eight divisions, with the Patriots in the AFC East and the Giants in the NFC East among them. Two Corey Dillon TD runs and a pair of Tom Brady scoring passes fueled New England's 28-6 win over Buffalo. Laurence Maroney's 74-yard kickoff return set up Dillon's second touchdown after the Bills had pulled within 7-3. "Any time a big play happens in the kicking game, it is a momentum-changer," said Patriots special teams captain Larry Izzo. "[They] not only change field position. They also change the energy of the game." The Giants grabbed the lead right away in their Monday night contest at Dallas, scoring five plays into the game on Eli Manning's 50-yard touchdown throw to Plaxico Burress. New York's defense recorded six sacks and grabbed four interceptions, the last one by Kevin Dockery, who returned it 96 yards for a late TD that iced the 36-22 victory and pushed New York past Philadelphia in the division.

"IT WAS A GAME THAT HAD NEARLY AS MANY ODD TWISTS AS A WASHINGTON POLITICAL SCANDAL."

–NFL.com account of the Colts' 36-22 win over the Redskins.

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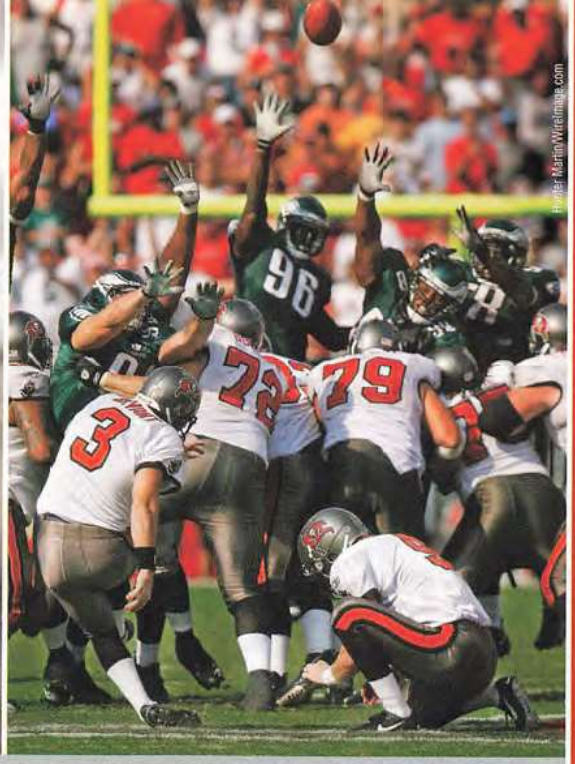
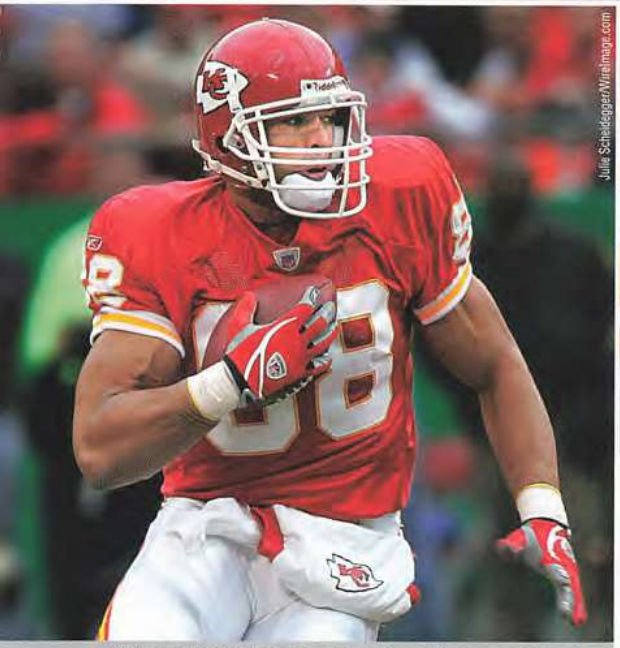


Hunter Martin/Wireimage.com

▲ BARBER, BRYANT BUOY THE BUCS. Ronde Barber (left) got Tampa Bay going against the Eagles by returning two interceptions for touchdowns, while Matt Bryant (right) finished things off by kicking a game-winning 62-yard field goal at the final gun.



Julie Scheidegger/Wireimage.com

▲ TONY TAKES CHARGE. Tony Gonzalez had six receptions for 138 yards in Kansas City's victory over San Diego.

Tim Heitman/US Presswire

▲ FOCUSED ON FIRST. Head coach Tom Coughlin (l) stands with Tiki Barber during a win that put the Giants atop the NFC East.

CATS FIGHT IT OUT

The Bengals put an end to Carolina's four-game win streak and snapped a two-game skid of their own by taking a 17-14 cliffhanger at Paul Brown Stadium. The victory also pulled Cincinnati even with the Ravens in the AFC North. Jake Delhomme threw first-half TD passes to Kris Mangum and Nick Goings as the Panthers forged a 14-7 halftime lead, but Shayne Graham's 23-yard field goal closed the gap and Carson Palmer engineered a 13-play, 86-yard drive for the go-ahead score capped by his 1-yard throw to T.J. Houshmandzadeh. Bengals safety Kevin Kaesviharn then preserved the win by making an end zone interception in front of Keyshawn Johnson. "I thought, 'Okay, it's a touchdown,'" said Johnson. "I don't even know where [he] came from. Had I known he was going to be there, I would've tackled him."

WEEK SEVEN SUPERLATIVES

Minnesota pulled away for a 31-13 decision at Seattle, the Seahawks' first home loss since 2004. Mewelde Moore's 15-yard halfback pass to Jermaine Wiggins broke a third-quarter tie and Chester Taylor added a 95-yard touchdown run that put the Vikings ahead 24-10…Denver's defensive prowess continued as the Broncos kept Cleveland off the scoreboard until the fourth quarter, yielded just 10 first downs, and gave up only 165 total yards in a 17-7 win…The Raiders won their first game of the year, 22-9, over Arizona. Randy Moss caught seven passes, including a 32-yard touchdown that gave Oakland a 14-0 lead…Leon Washington rushed for 129 yards and scored on runs of 5 and 16 yards to boost the Jets past Detroit.

WEEK 7

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, OCT. 22

@ Atlanta 41.....Pittsburgh 38 (OT)
@ Cincinnati 17.....Carolina 14
Denver 17.....@ Cleveland 7
Green Bay 34.....@ Miami 24
@ Houston 27.....Jacksonville 7
@ Indianapolis 36.....Washington 22
@ Kansas City 30.....San Diego 27
Minnesota 31.....@ Seattle 13
New England 28.....@ Buffalo 6
N.Y. Jets 31.....@ Detroit 24
@ Oakland 22.....Arizona 9
@ Tampa Bay 23.....Philadelphia 21

MONDAY, OCT. 23

N.Y. Giants 36.....@ Dallas 22

Open Dates: Baltimore, Chicago, New Orleans, St. Louis, San Francisco, Tennessee

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE
Peyton Manning (QB, Colts): Posted a 140.4 passer rating after completing 25 of 35 attempts for 342 yards and four TDs in victory over Washington.

DEFENSE
Derrick Burgess (DE, Raiders): Tallied two sacks, made five tackles, and deflected a pass that was intercepted and led to a TD in win over Arizona.

SPECIAL TEAMS
Laurence Maroney (KR-RB, Patriots): Had a 74-yard kickoff return, the team's longest in nearly two years, to set up a touchdown in win at Buffalo.

OFFENSE
Alge Crumpler (TE, Falcons): Had TD receptions of 31, 22, and 3 yards—all part of a six-catch day—to key overtime triumph against the Steelers.

DEFENSE
Ronde Barber (CB, Buccaneers): Made six tackles, forced a fumble, and returned interceptions 37 and 66 yards for scores in win over Philly.

SPECIAL TEAMS
Matt Bryant (K, Buccaneers): Made three field goals, hitting kicks from 30 and 44 yards before stunning Philadelphia with a 62-yarder at the final gun for a 23-21 win.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE
A. J. Hawk (LB, Packers): Contributed nine solo tackles, three assisted stops, and one sack in win at Miami.

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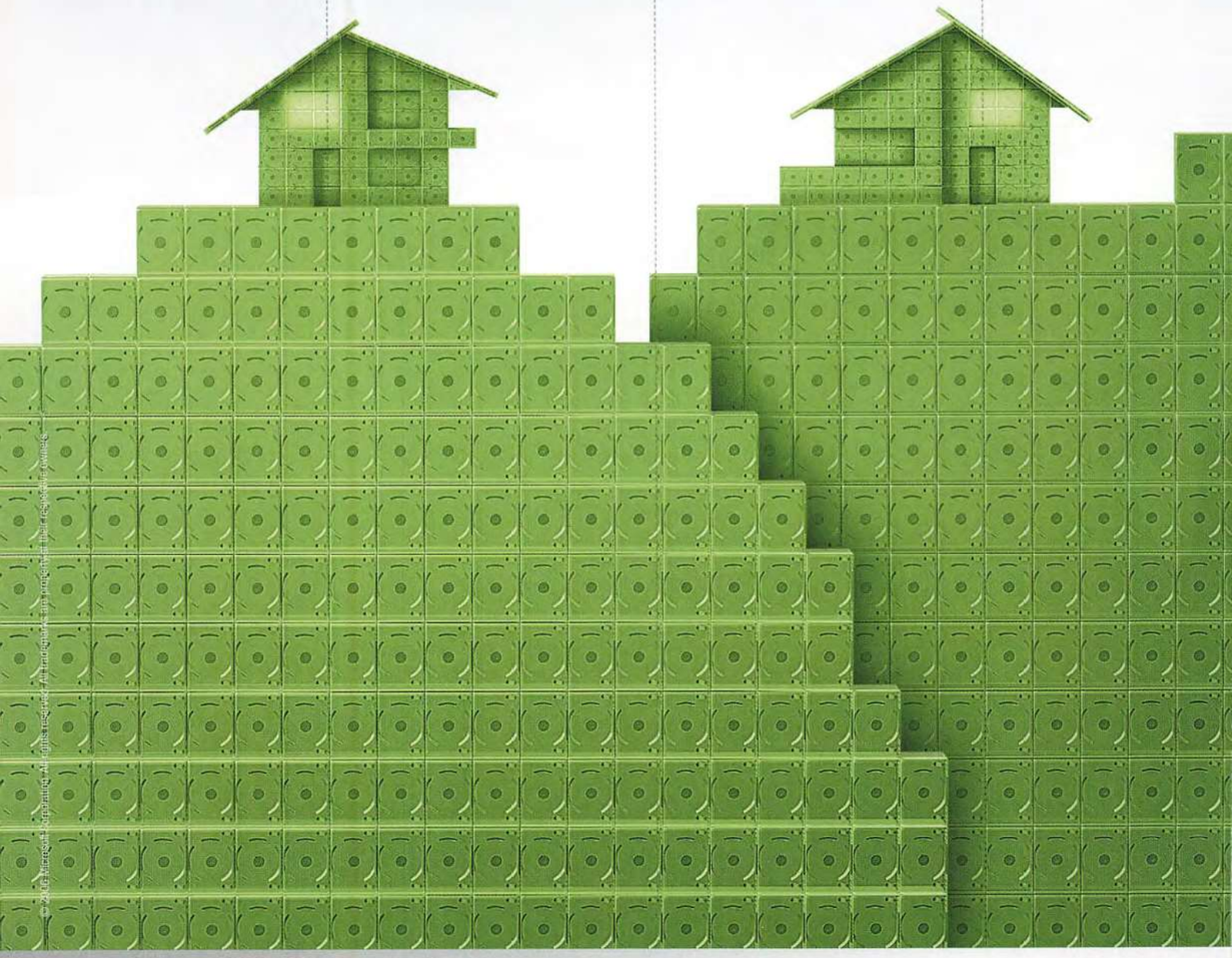

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WEEK 8 COLTS CONTINUE HIGH-FLYING START

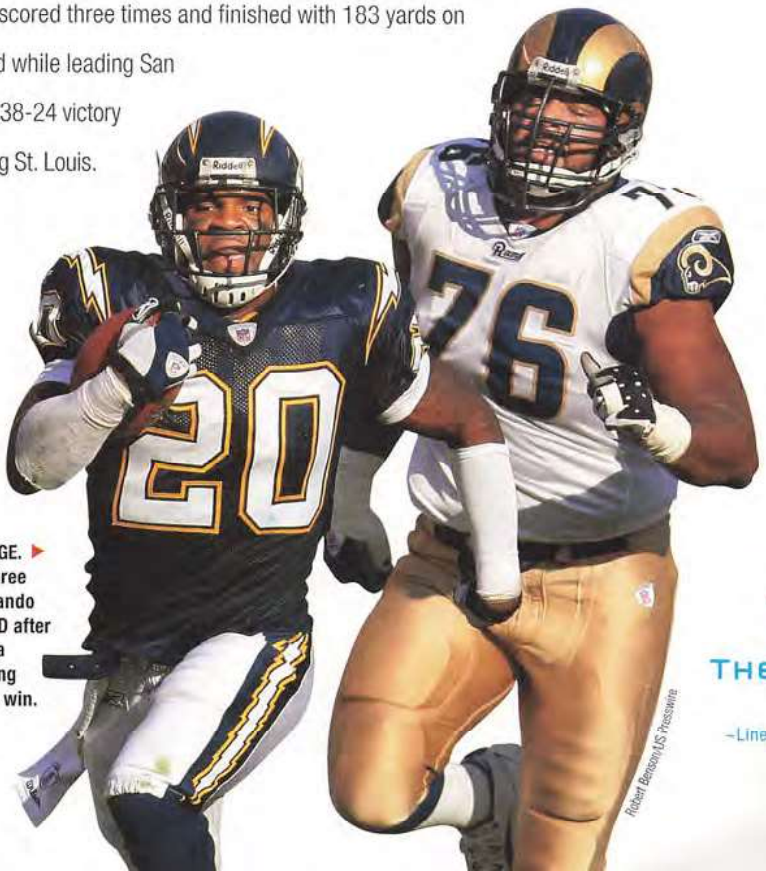
INDIANAPOLIS BECAME JUST THE SECOND TEAM IN NFL HISTORY TO POST BACK-TO-BACK 7-0 STARTS, BEATING THE BRONCOS, 34-31, IN A THRILL-PACKED CONTEST THAT WASN'T DECIDED UNTIL THE CLOSING SECONDS.

Finally poking holes in the league's top-ranked defense, the Colts' Peyton Manning directed five second-half scoring drives, the last one setting up Adam Vinatieri's 34-yard field goal with two seconds remaining. It marked the 19th time Vinatieri won a game in the final minute or in overtime. Manning threw for 345 yards and had three touchdown passes to Reggie Wayne, including a 19-yarder that put Indianapolis ahead, 31-28, and marked the game's seventh lead change. The Broncos knotted things up on Jason Elam's 49-yard FG with 1:49 to play, before the Colts drove 62 yards in eight plays for the winning score.

The league's other undefeated team, the Chicago Bears, came out quickly after their bye week, turning four San Francisco turnovers into TDs en route to a 41-10 triumph. Rex Grossman threw for three touchdowns and Thomas Jones rushed for 111 yards in the win.

AFC East-leading New England improved to 6-1 and gained momentum heading into its showdown against the Colts by taking the measure of Minnesota, 31-7. Tom Brady completed passes to 10 different receivers as part of his 372-yard, four-touchdown effort.

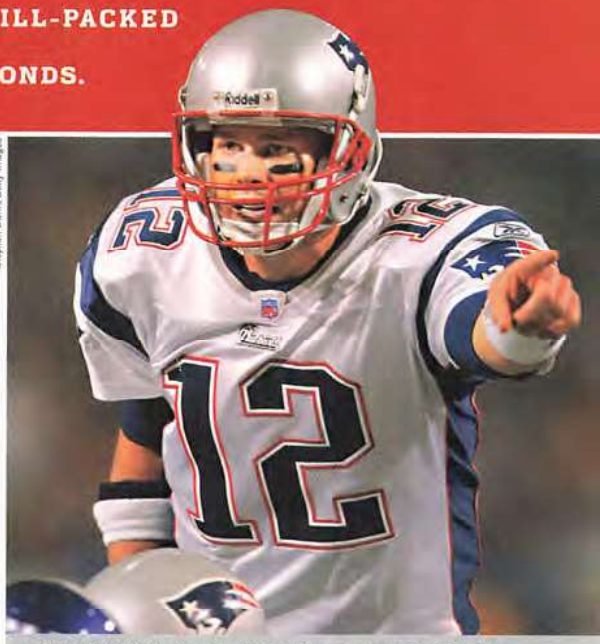
LaDainian Tomlinson, playing in his 86th game, reached 90 touchdowns faster than anyone in NFL history except Jim Brown and went over 8,000 career rushing yards. He scored three times and finished with 183 yards on the ground while leading San Diego to a 38-24 victory over visiting St. Louis.



Robert Benson/MS Presswire

QUICK CHARGE. ▶ **Marlon McCree outruns Orlando Pace for a TD after recovering a fumble during San Diego's win.**

Stephen Dunn/Getty Images



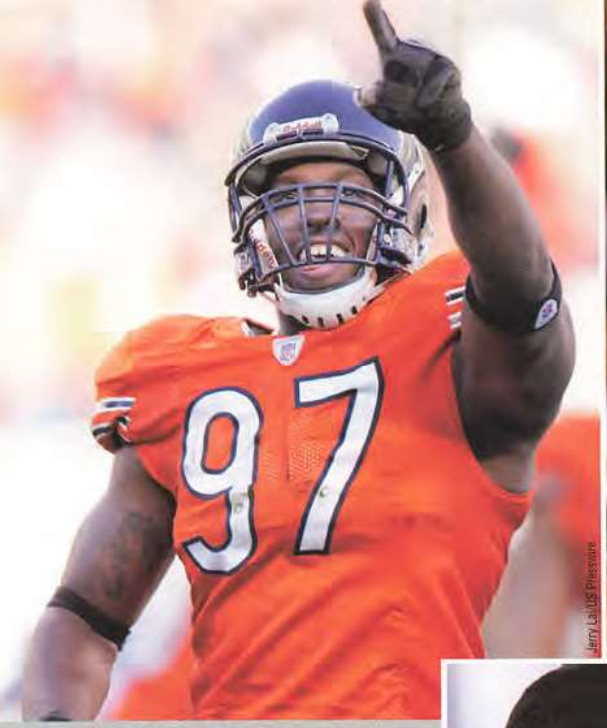
▲ **STRONG SIGNAL. Tom Brady (4 TD passes) and the Patriots handled the Vikings to earn their fourth straight victory.**

NORTH-SOUTH SHOWDOWNS

Two of the week's featured interconference matchups scrambled the leaderboard in a couple of divisions. In New Orleans, the Ravens stopped the Saints, 35-22, to move atop the AFC North. Steve McNair ran for Baltimore's first score and threw for two other TDs before halftime, while the Ravens' defense provided 14 more points on interception returns from Ronnie Prude and Dawan Landry that went the distance. Jamal Lewis rushed for 109 yards on 31 carries, his first 100-yard game of the year, prompting Baltimore head coach Brian Billick to say, "It's great to get him cranked up." Atlanta pulled even with the Saints in the NFC South by winning, 29-27, at Cincinnati. Michael Vick threw for 291 yards and three TDs while running for another 55 yards. "He's a heck of a player," said Bengals defensive end Bryan Robinson. "When your goal is to keep him in the pocket and you do that and he still makes the play, it's frustrating." Vick broke a 20-20 tie with an 8-yard scoring pass to Justin Griffith late in the third quarter.

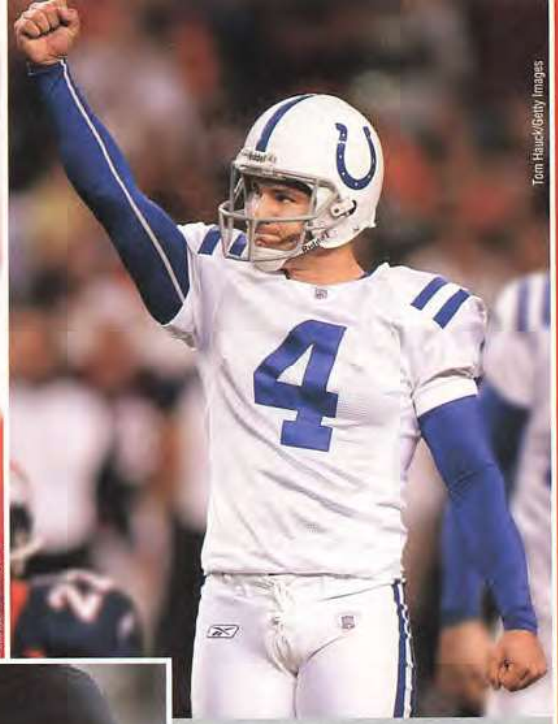
"EVERYONE WANTS TO SAY THEY DIDN'T PLAY WELL. THERE'S A REASON THEY DIDN'T PLAY WELL."

–Linebacker Brian Urlacher, after the Bears turned in another dominating defensive effort in a win over the 49ers.



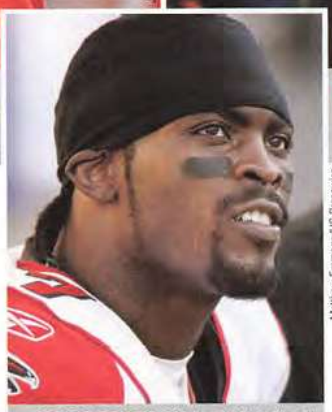
Jerry Lai/US Presswire

▲ HERE'S TO YOU. Mark Anderson gives a smile to fans at Soldier Field after his fourth-quarter sack against the 49ers.



Tom Hauck/Getty Images

▲ AND IT'S GOOD. Adam Vinatieri sees his game-winning field goal through the uprights as the Colts stayed undefeated.



Matthew Emmons/US Presswire

▲ MAGIC TOUCH. Michael Vick fired three TD passes in Atlanta's win.

COWBOYS UP

Trailing, 14-0, in the early going and relying on a QB making his first career start to bring them back, the Cowboys erupted for a franchise-record 25 fourth-quarter points to defeat Carolina, 35-14. The win kept Dallas within a game of the NFC East-leading Giants. Touchdown runs by DeShaun Foster and Steve Smith had put the Panthers ahead, but the Cowboys made it 14-10 at halftime, then got within one on Mike Vanderjagt's 24-yard field goal with 9:52 to play. On the ensuing kickoff, Sam Hurd forced and recovered a Carolina fumble, and Julius Jones followed with a 14-yard TD run that put Dallas ahead to stay. The Panthers would turn the ball over two more times, with both miscues leading to Marion Barber scoring runs that accounted for the final margin. Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo completed 24 of 36 passes for 270 yards, with Terrell Owens (nine receptions) his favorite target. "You never know what you're going to get with a new starter who is untested," admitted Romo. "I was anxious just like [head coach] Bill [Parcells] to see what we were going to do out there."

Streeter Lecka/Getty Images

▲ COACHES HUDDLE. Carolina's John Fox (l) and Dallas' Bill Parcells share a laugh prior to their Week Eight meeting.

WEEK EIGHT GREATS

Jacksonville limited Philadelphia's league-leading offense to 227 total yards and yielded just two field goals in its 13-6 victory. Fred Taylor rushed for 103 yards, including a 15-yard first-quarter jaunt for the game's lone TD, and helped the Jaguars control the ball for nearly 37 minutes…The Giants didn't allow a touchdown, either, in taking a 17-3 decision over Tampa Bay. New York scored on Eli Manning's 7-yard pass to Plaxico Burress, Brandon Jacobs' 1-yard run, and a 31-yard Jay Feely field goal…Reuben Droughns rushed for 125 yards and his second-quarter TD gave the Browns the lead for good in a 20-13 win over the Jets…Oakland managed just 98 yards of offense, but got a 100-yard interception return from Chris Carr as part of its 20-13 win over Pittsburgh… Vince Young ran 20 yards for one TD and later threw a 20-yard scoring pass to Bobby Wade, sparking Tennessee's 28-22 win over Houston…Larry Johnson rushed for 155 yards and scored four TDs, capped by his game-winning 3-yard run with 2:15 remaining, in Kansas City's 35-28 triumph over Seattle.

WEEK 8

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, OCT. 29

Atlanta 29 ..... @ Cincinnati 27
Baltimore 35 ..... @ New Orleans 22
@ Chicago 41 ..... San Francisco 10
@ Cleveland 20 ..... N.Y. Jets 13
@ Green Bay 31 ..... Arizona 14
Indianapolis 34 ..... @ Denver 31
Jacksonville 13 ..... @ Philadelphia 6
@ Kansas City 35 ..... Seattle 28
@ N.Y. Giants 17 ..... Tampa Bay 3
@ Oakland 20 ..... Pittsburgh 13
@ San Diego 38 ..... St. Louis 24
@ Tennessee 28 ..... Houston 22
Dallas 35 ..... @ Carolina 14

MONDAY, OCT. 30

New England 31 ..... @ Minnesota 7

Open Dates: Buffalo, Detroit, Miami, Washington

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Larry Johnson (RB, Chiefs): Had a franchise-record 39 carries for 155 yards and three TDs, and also caught a touchdown pass, in win over Seattle.

DEFENSE

Sean Jones (S, Browns): Intercepted two passes, defensed another, and contributed five tackles as part of a victory over N.Y. Jets.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Adam Vinatieri (K, Colts): Made field goals from 42, 30, 48, and 37 yards, the last one the game-winner with two seconds to go, against Denver.

OFFENSE

Michael Vick (QB, Falcons): In leading a road win vs. Cincinnati, completed 20 of 28 passes for 291 yards and three TDs, with a 140.6 passer rating.

DEFENSE

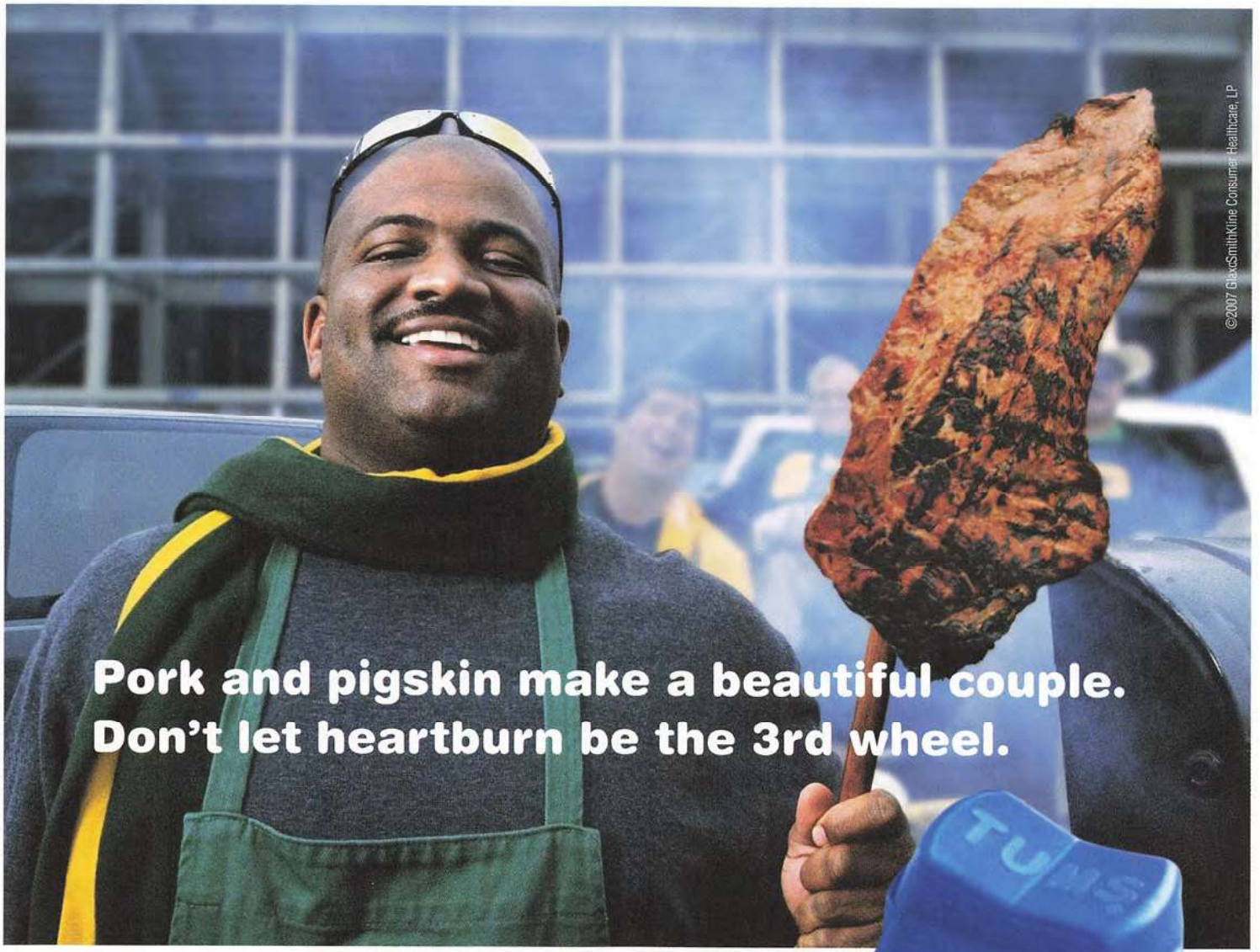
Aaron Kampman (DE, Packers): Had eight tackles, including two sacks, and added three QB pressures to spark triumph over Arizona.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Sam Hurd (WR, Cowboys): Forced a fumble on a fourth-quarter kickoff and recovered the ball, setting up the go-ahead TD in victory at Carolina.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Marques Colston (WR, Saints): Caught six passes for 163 yards, including touchdown receptions of 25 and 47 yards, against Baltimore.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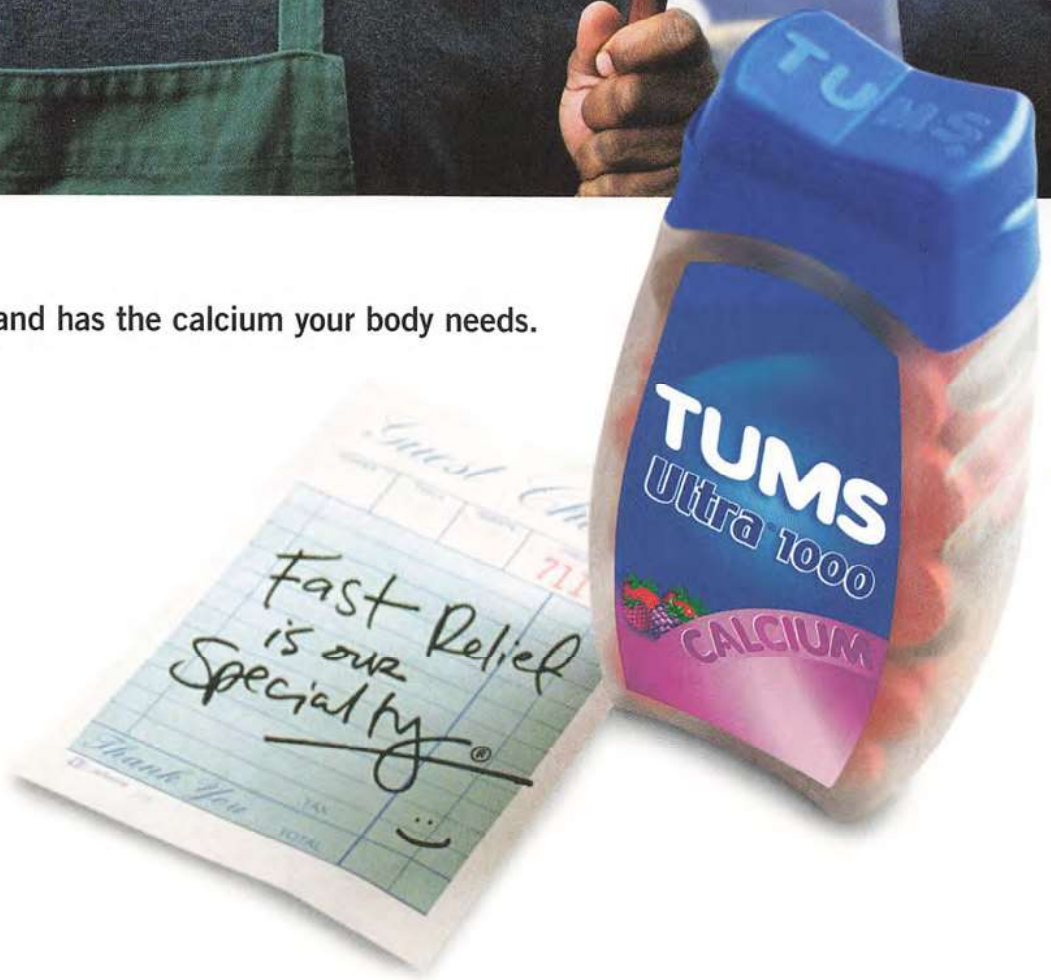


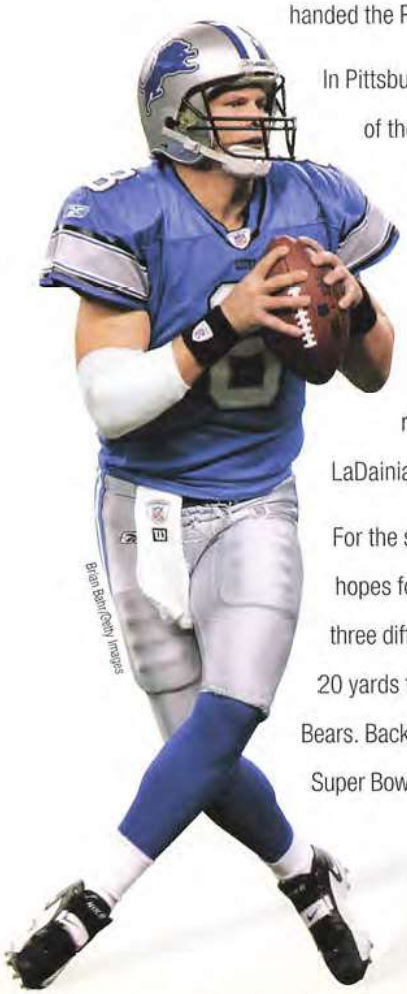
WEEK 9 ENJOYING A FEW MIDSEASON CLASSICS

AS THE 2006 NFL SEASON MOVED ACROSS THE HALFWAY MARK, FANS WERE TREATED TO A WEEKEND THAT BOASTED MARQUEE MATCHUPS, UNUSUAL ENDINGS, AND MORE THAN A FEW SURPRISES.

Scott Audette/AP WWP

▲ **RIGHT ON, ROOKIE. The Saints' Marques Colston continued his standout campaign with 11 catches vs. Tampa Bay.**

The Colts continued to roll, improving to 8-0 with their 27-20 victory over New England. Peyton Manning threw a pair of touchdown passes to Marvin Harrison and former Patriot Adam Vinatieri kicked a 23-yard field goal just before halftime that put Indianapolis ahead for good. The up-and-down affair saw each team punt just once, but the Colts' defense proved the difference by grabbing four interceptions, two of those by Cato June, as they handed the Patriots their second loss of the season.



Brian Bahr/Getty Images

In Pittsburgh, the Steelers and Broncos squared off in a rematch of the previous year's AFC title game. And with a different venue came a different result as Javon Walker grabbed two TD receptions and Denver's defense forced six turnovers, leading to a 31-20 triumph. With the win, the Broncos improved to 6-2 and remained even with San Diego atop the AFC West. The Chargers received 172 rushing yards and three touchdowns from LaDainian Tomlinson, enough to hold off Cleveland, 32-25.

For the second time in history, Miami put an end to Chicago's hopes for an undefeated season. Joey Harrington tossed TDs to three different receivers and Jason Taylor returned an interception 20 yards for the go-ahead score in a 31-13 victory over the host Bears. Back in 1985, Chicago was 12-0 (and on its way to winning Super Bowl XX) before before being tripped by the Dolphins.

◀ **KITNA CONNECTS. Lions QB Jon Kitna threw for 321 yards and had a 60-yard TD to Roy Williams in a win over Atlanta.**

BY THE SKIN OF THEIR TEETH

One of the NFL's fiercest rivalries added one of its oddest chapters when Washington tripped up the Cowboys, 22-19, on Nick Novak's 47-yard field goal *after* the final gun. "Gosh," admitted Redskins head coach Joe Gibbs, "I don't know if I've experienced anything like that." Novak had missed a 49-yard FG attempt moments earlier and Dallas moved into position for a potential game-winning kick of its own, but Mike Vanderjagt's 35-yarder was blocked by Troy Vincent. Time expired as Washington's Sean Taylor grabbed the loose ball and ran downfield before being tackled at the Cowboys' 45. Dallas, however, was whistled for a facemask penalty on the

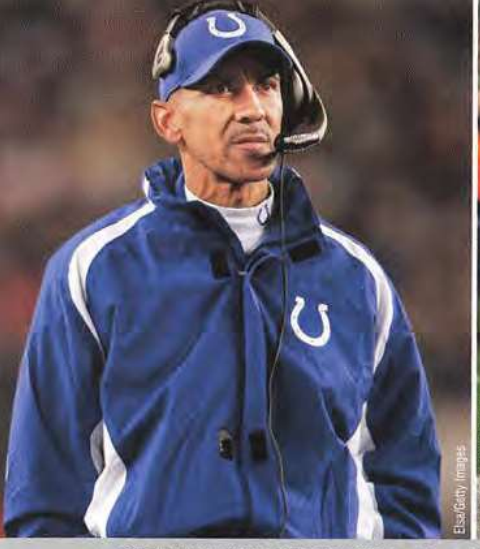
WEEK 9 STANDINGS

AFC EAST	W-L-T	PF	PA
New England	6-2-0	187	114
N.Y. Jets	4-4-0	160	193
Buffalo	3-5-0	124	163
Miami	2-6-0	133	158
AFC NORTH	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Baltimore	6-2-0	171	111
Cincinnati	4-4-0	175	168
Cleveland	2-6-0	133	171
Pittsburgh	2-6-0	177	176

AFC SOUTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
Indianapolis	8-0-0	232	173
Jacksonville	5-3-0	175	114
Houston	2-6-0	131	196
Tennessee	2-6-0	120	216
AFC WEST	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Denver	6-2-0	141	98
San Diego	6-2-0	248	134
Kansas City	5-3-0	183	169
Oakland	2-6-0	92	164

NFC EAST	W-L-T	PF	PA
N.Y. Giants	6-2-0	194	144
Dallas	4-4-0	223	164
Philadelphia	4-4-0	206	160
Washington	3-5-0	162	190
NFC NORTH	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Chicago	7-1-0	234	100
Minnesota	4-4-0	130	135
Green Bay	3-5-0	162	200
Detroit	2-6-0	162	203

NFC SOUTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
New Orleans	6-2-0	198	159
Atlanta	5-3-0	167	164
Carolina	4-4-0	137	163
Tampa Bay	2-6-0	102	173
NFC WEST	**W-L-T**	**PF**	**PA**
Seattle	5-3-0	165	177
St. Louis	4-4-0	180	197
San Francisco	3-5-0	143	238
Arizona	1-7-0	134	196



Elsa/Getty Images

Jim Rogash/WireImage.com

▲ **STRETCHING THEIR STREAK. With head coach Tony Dungy (left) looking on, the Colts and Marvin Harrison (right) slipped past the Patriots to remain undefeated. Harrison had two TD receptions in the win, Indianapolis' second in two years in New England.**

return. Since a game can't end on an accepted defensive penalty, the Redskins were allowed one more play, which became Novak's FG. "It's a short walk from the outhouse to the penthouse," joked Novak, who had earlier hit from 28 yards. "This is what a kicker dreams about. There are ups and downs, and this was the up." The Cowboys had taken a 19-12 lead on Tony Romo's 4-yard TD pass to Terrell Owens, before Mark Brunell evened things up with his 18-yard toss to Chris Cooley early in the fourth quarter.

Mike Ehrmann/WireImage.com

▲ **BAILEY BLOCKS IT. A lunging Champ Bailey prevents Pittsburgh's Hines Ward from making a catch. The Broncos cornerback also had two pickoffs in the 31-20 win.**

TURNOVERS TURN IT

Protecting the ball proved paramount in Week Nine. In a battle of Missouri, Kansas City capitalized on three St. Louis fumbles to grab a quick 17-point edge on its way to a 31-17 win. Larry Johnson scored the game's first TD with his 1-yard run and finished with 172 yards rushing while helping the Chiefs earn their third straight victory. In Detroit, the Lions converted two Atlanta turnovers into touchdown runs by Kevin Jones, and Roy Williams added a 60-yard TD catch for a 30-14 triumph over the Falcons. Green Bay dominated the Bills on the stat sheet, holding a 427 to 184 edge in total yards, but the Packers were guilty of four turnovers and the result was a 24-10 setback. One of those was a 17-yard interception return for a TD by Buffalo's London Fletcher-Baker. "We put an emphasis on not worrying about what happens on the other side of the ball," said Fletcher-Baker. "We knew if we didn't allow them to score, our offense would be able to do [what it needed to]." In Baltimore, the Ravens solidified their hold on their AFC North by handling the Bengals, 26-20, a victory aided by two early TDs off turnovers. Cincinnati fumbled the opening kickoff, leading to Jamal Lewis' short scoring run, and Samari Rolle intercepted a pass on the Bengals' next possession. He returned it to the 25 before pitching the ball to Ed Reed, who ran it in for a TD. "It was just a great play on his part," said Reed. "Just good awareness letting it go and knowing it was me."

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

At the season's midway point, the Giants' Tiki Barber was the NFL's rushing leader with 830 yards while the Eagles' Donovan McNabb had thrown for a league-best 2,312 yards. Peyton Manning of the Colts was first in both touchdown passes (17) and passer rating (106.0), while the Texans' Andre Johnson was the leader in both pass receptions (65) and reception yards (752). Defensively, the Jaguars' Rashean Mathis had a league-best six interceptions and Aaron Kampman of the Packers was first in sacks with 9.5.

WEEK 9

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, NOV. 5

@ Baltimore 26 ..... Cincinnati 20
@ Buffalo 24 ..... Green Bay 10
Denver 31 ..... @ Pittsburgh 20
@ Detroit 30 ..... Atlanta 14
@ Jacksonville 37 ..... Tennessee 7
Kansas City 31 ..... @ St. Louis 17
Miami 31 ..... @ Chicago 13
New Orleans 31 ..... @ Tampa Bay 14
@ N.Y. Giants 14 ..... Houston 10
@ San Diego 32 ..... Cleveland 25
@ San Francisco 9 ..... Minnesota 3
@ Washington 22 ..... Dallas 19
Indianapolis 27 ..... @ New England 20

MONDAY, NOV. 6

@ Seattle 16 ..... Oakland 0

Open Dates: Arizona, Carolina, N.Y. Jets, Philadelphia

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

LaDainian Tomlinson (RB, Chargers): Rushed for 172 yards on 18 carries (9.6 yards per attempt) and had three second-half TDs in win over Browns.

DEFENSE

Jason Taylor (DE, Dolphins): Returned interception 20 yards for a TD and added three tackles and a forced fumble to send Bears to first loss.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Brian Moorman (P, Bills): Posted a 46.3-net yard average, placing two punts inside the 15-yard line, to help Buffalo gain a win over Green Bay.

OFFENSE

Drew Brees (QB, Saints): Completed 24 of 32 passes for 314 yards and three TDs—while sporting a 136.7 passer rating—in win at Tampa Bay.

DEFENSE

Brandon Moore (LB, 49ers): Recorded a career-high 14 tackles, while adding two half-sacks and three quarterback pressures, in victory over Minnesota.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Troy Vincent (S, Redskins): Blocked first kick in 15-year career, preventing Cowboys from game-winning FG and setting up Washington's victory.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Marques Colston (WR, Saints): Won second straight weekly award after catching 11 passes for 123 yards and one TD in win over Tampa Bay.

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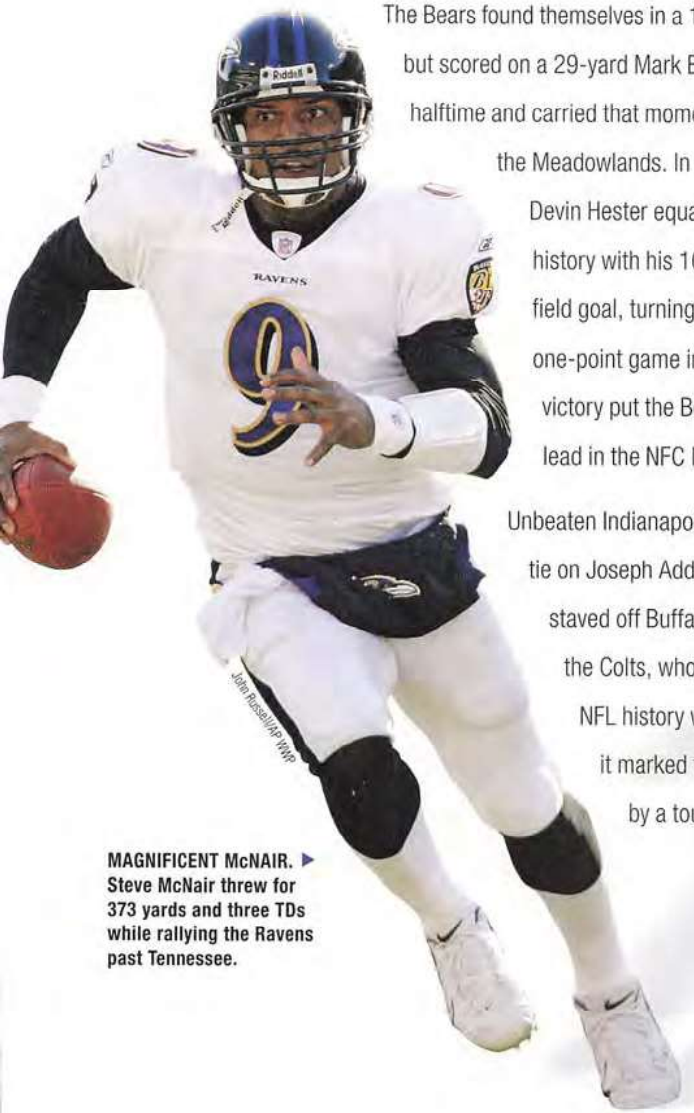
WEEK 10 BOUNCING BACK IN A BIG WAY

ON AN INCREDIBLY UNPREDICTABLE WEEKEND TO START THE SEASON'S SECOND HALF, THREE DIVISION LEADERS—SAN DIEGO, BALTIMORE, AND CHICAGO—STAGED COMEBACKS FROM DOUBLE-DIGIT DEFICITS TO EARN ROAD VICTORIES.

After trailing by 21 points at halftime, the Chargers stormed back to beat the Bengals, 49-41. LaDainian Tomlinson scored four times—giving him 15 touchdowns in a five-game stretch—and his 9-yard run early in the fourth quarter moved San Diego ahead for good. Philip Rivers completed 24 of 36 passes and threw three second-half TDs, two of them to tight end Brandon Manumaleuna. With the victory, the Chargers improved to 7-2 and kept a share of the AFC West lead.

Steve McNair returned to Tennessee—where he spent the previous nine seasons—and directed the AFC North-leading Ravens back from a 19-point deficit for a 27-26 triumph. He tossed three TDs, including the game-winner to another former Titan, Derrick Mason, with 3:35 to play. Trevor Pryce then blocked a last-second FG attempt to preserve the win.

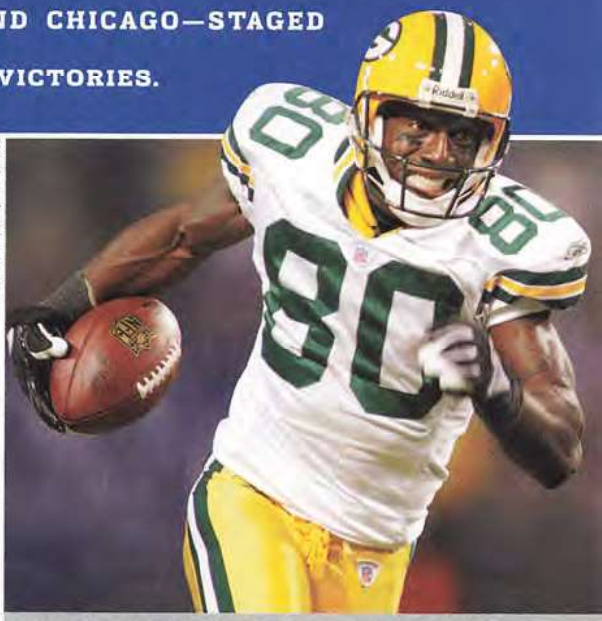


John Russell/AP Wire Photo

MAGNIFICENT McNAIR. ▶ Steve McNair threw for 373 yards and three TDs while rallying the Ravens past Tennessee.

The Bears found themselves in a 13-3 hole against the Giants, but scored on a 29-yard Mark Bradley reception just before halftime and carried that momentum to a 38-20 victory at the Meadowlands. In the fourth quarter, Chicago's Devin Hester equaled the longest play in NFL history with his 108-yard return of a missed field goal, turning what could have been a one-point game into an 11-point cushion. The victory put the Bears' record at 8-1 as their lead in the NFC North grew to four games.

Unbeaten Indianapolis snapped a third-quarter tie on Joseph Addai's 5-yard TD run and then staved off Buffalo for a 17-16 victory. For the Colts, who became the first team in NFL history with consecutive 9-0 starts, it marked their seventh win of the year by a touchdown or less.



Bruce Kluckhohn/US Presswire

▲ HE'S GOT THE DRIVE. Donald Driver had six receptions for 191 yards, including an 82-yard TD, in Green Bay's win.

MAKING A RACE OF IT

The Jets made the AFC East a bit more interesting, pulling within one game of division leader New England after their 17-14 victory on a rain-swept afternoon in Foxborough. New York improved to 5-4 while beating the Patriots for the first time in eight meetings. Meanwhile, New England—the three-time defending division champion—suffered back-to-back losses for the first time since 2002, a span of 57 games. The Jets' first scoring drive covered 16 plays and took 9:21 off the clock before ending with Kevan Barlow's 2-yard run. That was followed by a 15-play third-quarter march capped by Mike Nugent's 34-yard field goal, making New York's lead 10-6. The game's key sequence came midway through the fourth quarter, when Erik Coleman intercepted a Tom Brady pass and returned it to the Patriots' 35. Four plays later, Chad Pennington (22 of 33, 168 yards) connected with Jerricho Cotchery on a 22-yard TD pass for what proved to be the decisive points. "At the end of the day, we kept ourselves alive in the division race—[if we had lost] it was over. We were all aware of that," said Jets linebacker Matt Chatham.

"I HAVE A LOT OF GREAT MEMORIES FROM HERE. I'D LIKE TO ADD THIS TO IT."

–Jets head coach Eric Mangini after his team's victory at New England, where he served for six seasons as an assistant.

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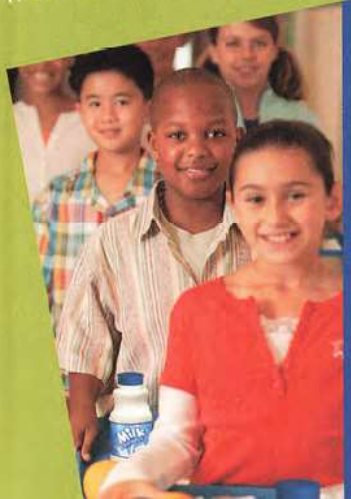

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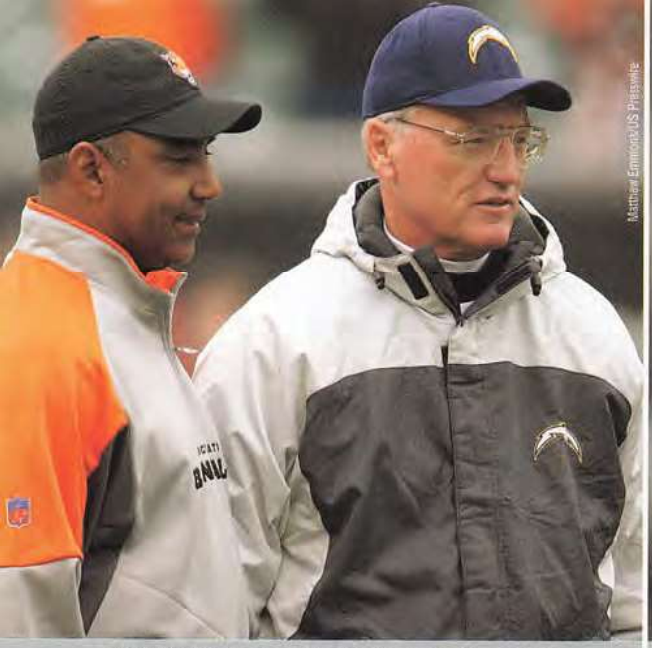
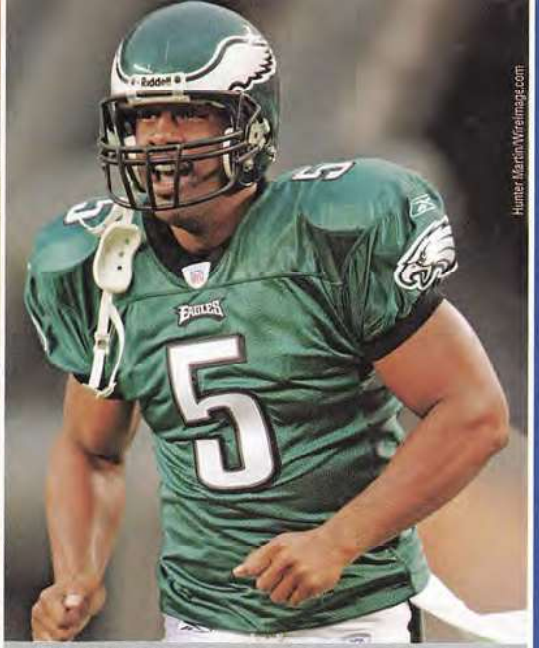
Support. Act. Inform. Lead.

Action for Healthy Kids works with schools across the country to improve nutrition and physical activity for all kids during the school day. By eating healthy and being active, children are better equipped to learn and achieve.



Matthew Emmons/US Presswire

▲ CHALK TALK. Head coaches Marvin Lewis (l) and Marty Schottenheimer chat prior to the Bengals-Chargers contest.



Hunter Martin/Mfireimage.com

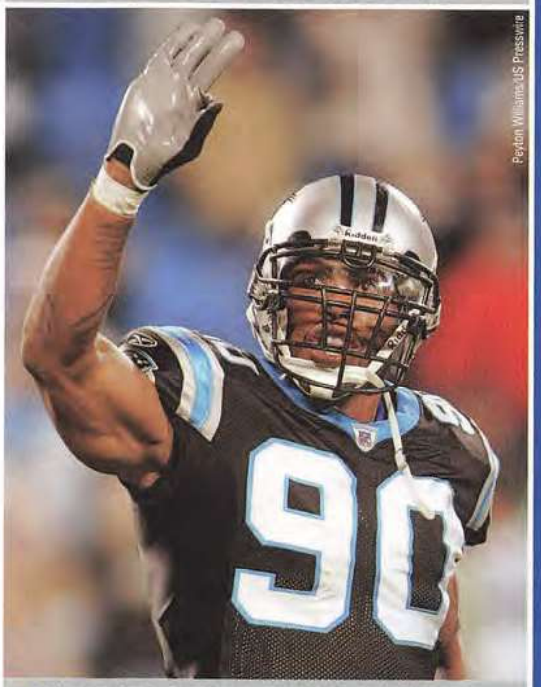
▲ STRIVE FOR FIVE. Donovan McNabb and the Eagles gained their fifth win of the season by beating Washington.

A SERIES OF SURPRISES

While what constitutes an upset in the NFL is open to interpretation, it's safe to say there were some surprises in Week 10. Among the winners were the Texans, who traveled to Jacksonville and beat the Jaguars, 13-10, to sweep the season series from their AFC South rival. Wali Lundy's 1-yard TD run capped Houston's first drive, and its defense picked off four passes, two that set up Kris Brown field goals. "We just wanted to show that the first time we beat them wasn't a fluke," said QB David Carr. Miami tripped up Kansas City by an identical score behind Ronnie Brown's 1-yard TD run and a pair of Olindo Mare field goals, while Cleveland went into Atlanta, scored early on Reuben Droughns' 1-yard run and Charlie Frye's 19-yard pass to Braylon Edwards, and came away with a 17-13 decision. Green Bay edged host Minnesota, 23-17, to pull even with the Vikings for second place in the NFC North. Brett Favre's 82-yard TD pass to Donald Driver late in the first half put the Packers ahead to stay.

TENDING TO WEEK 10

The Seahawks forged a two-game lead in the NFC West as they beat the Rams on a last-second Josh Brown field goal for the second time in a month. This time it was Brown's 38-yard kick with nine seconds to go that lifted host Seattle to a 24-22 win…Donovan McNabb's 84-yard TD pass to Donté Stallworth and Sheldon Brown's 70-yard interception return for a score lifted the Eagles past Washington, 27-3… The Steelers squandered a 14-point lead but came back to beat New Orleans, 38-31. Ben Roethlisberger threw three touchdown passes and Willie Parker became the first back of 2006 to rush for more than 200 yards in a game, finishing with 213 and scoring twice…The Broncos pushed across 10 fourth-quarter points to edge Oakland, 17-13, and win their fourth straight game. Jake Plummer directed the winning drive by completing seven straight passes, capped by a 1-yard scoring toss to Kyle Johnson…Dallas' Tony Romo completed 20 of 29 passes for 308 yards, highlighted by a 51-yard TD to Terrell Owens that broke the game open, in a 28-10 win at Arizona… The 49ers' Frank Gore set a franchise record by rushing for 148 yards in the first half, which included a 61-yard scoring run, in a 19-13 win at Detroit… Jake Delhomme passed for 240 yards, and his 36-yard touchdown strike to Steve Smith with 3:11 to play iced Carolina's 24-10 win over Tampa Bay…Road teams won 10 of the weekend's 16 games.



Peyton Williams/US Presswire

▲ THREE FOR ME. Carolina's Julius Peppers signals to the fans after making his third sack against Tampa Bay.

WEEK 10

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, NOV. 12

Baltimore 27 .....@ Tennessee 26
Cleveland 17 .....@ Atlanta 13
Dallas 27 .....@ Arizona 10
Denver 17.....@ Oakland 13
Green Bay 23.....@ Minnesota 17
Houston 13.....@ Jacksonville 10
@ Indianapolis 17.....Buffalo 16
@ Miami 13.....Kansas City 10
N.Y. Jets 17.....@ New England 14
@ Philadelphia 27.....Washington 3
@ Pittsburgh 38 .....New Orleans 31
San Diego 49 .....@ Cincinnati 41
San Francisco 19 .....@ Detroit 13
@ Seattle 24.....St. Louis 22
Chicago 38 .....@ N.Y. Giants 20

MONDAY, NOV. 13

@ Carolina 24.....Tampa Bay 10

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Willie Parker (RB, Steelers): Rushed for 213 yards—featuring runs of 76 and 72 yards—and scored two touchdowns in win over Saints.

DEFENSE

Dewayne Robertson (DT, Jets): Contributed six tackles, including a key fourth-quarter sack, that sparked a victory at New England.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Trevor Pryce (DE, Ravens): Blocked a last-minute field goal to preserve a win over the Titans and give Baltimore a three-game lead in AFC North.

OFFENSE

Tony Romo (QB, Cowboys): Threw for 308 yards—with TDs of 30 and 51 yards—and had a 152.1 passer rating in second half of win at Arizona.

DEFENSE

Julius Peppers (DE, Panthers): Helped stymie Tampa Bay offense with four tackles, three sacks, three QB hurries, two passes defensed, and a fumble recovery that led to a Carolina TD.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Devin Hester (CB-PR, Bears): Caught 52-yard FG attempt in end zone and returned it 108 yards for a touchdown as part of win over Giants.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

A.J. Hawk (LB, Packers): Recorded 13 total tackles, 1.5 sacks, and forced a fumble in win over Vikings.

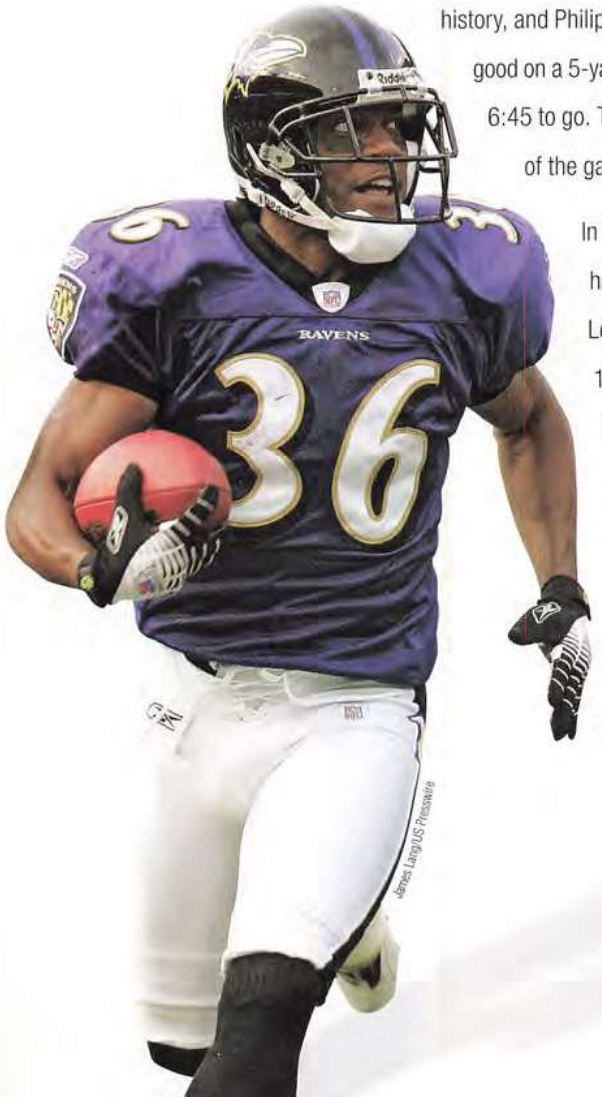
WEEK 11 DALLAS & LADAINIAN DOMINATE THE DAY

WHILE THE COWBOYS WERE WORKING TO KNOCK OFF THE LAST OF THE LEAGUE'S UNBEATENS, LADAINIAN TOMLINSON WAS WORKING HIS WAY INTO THE NFL RECORD BOOK AND PUTTING SAN DIEGO IN CHARGE OF THE AFC WEST.

Sparked by Marion Barber's two fourth-quarter touchdown runs, the Cowboys rallied past Indianapolis, 21-14, to move into a first-place tie in the NFC East while handing the Colts their first setback of the season. Trailing 7-0 at halftime, Dallas got on the board when Kevin Burnett brought back a Peyton Manning interception 39 yards for a score. After Indy regained the lead, Dallas quarterback Tony Romo (19 of 23, 226 yards) launched drives of 69 and 80 yards, both capped by Barber's TDs. The Cowboys' defense then held tough, stopping the Colts on downs at the 8-yard line in the closing minutes to preserve the win.

For the second straight week, San Diego rallied to victory after trailing by 17 points, the first NFL team to accomplish such a feat. This time, they fell behind Denver, 24-7, in a showdown between AFC West co-leaders. Tomlinson scored his team's first three TDs, in the process reaching 100 career touchdowns faster than anyone in NFL history, and Philip Rivers put the Chargers ahead for good on a 5-yard TD pass to Vincent Jackson with 6:45 to go. Tomlinson later added his fourth TD of the game to clinch the 35-27 decision.

In Houston, J.P. Losman—who earlier had thrown a pair of 83-yard TDs to Lee Evans—hit Peerless Price from 15 yards out with nine seconds to go, lifting Buffalo to a 24-21 win. The Steelers slipped past Cleveland, 24-20, on Ben Roethlisberger's 4-yard TD pass to Willie Parker with 32 seconds on the clock.



James Lang/US Presswire

◀ **MANY HAPPY RETURNS. The Ravens' B.J. Sams netted 212 yards on returns and sparked a comeback win against Atlanta.**

David Podwika/Wirelmage.com

▲ **ROMO RALLIES 'EM. Dallas' Tony Romo directed two scoring drives in the fourth quarter to defeat Indianapolis, 21-14.**

A SHOUTOUT FOR SHUTOUTS

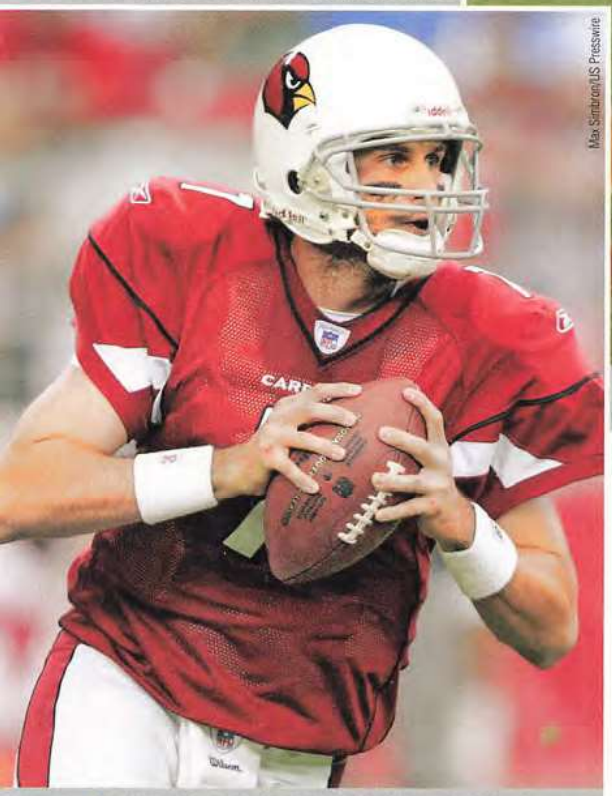
Three division leaders were victorious via shutout, starting with the Bears, who improved to 9-1 by beating the Jets, 10-0. After a scoreless first half, Chicago broke through on Robbie Gould's 20-yard field goal and Rex Grossman's 57-yard pass to Mark Bradley, while its defense thwarted a pair of Jets scoring threats with interceptions by Brian Urlacher and Nathan Vasher. "New York has been good to us," said Bears head coach Lovie Smith, whose team beat the Giants a week earlier at the Meadowlands. "Coming here, a tough place to play, and getting two wins is big." New England reestablished a two-game lead in the AFC East by blanking Green Bay, 35-0. Tom Brady tied a career high with four touchdown passes, and the Patriots' defense allowed just five first downs and 120 total yards. Carolina forced a tie for first in the NFC South with its 15-0 shutout of the Rams. The Panthers yielded just 111 total yards while dealing St. Louis its first shutout since 1998.

"THAT WAS NOT A GAME-SAVING PLAY. THAT WAS A SEASON-SAVER."

–Kansas City's Patrick Surtain on teammate Jarrad Page's end zone interception that preserved a 17-13 win over the Raiders.

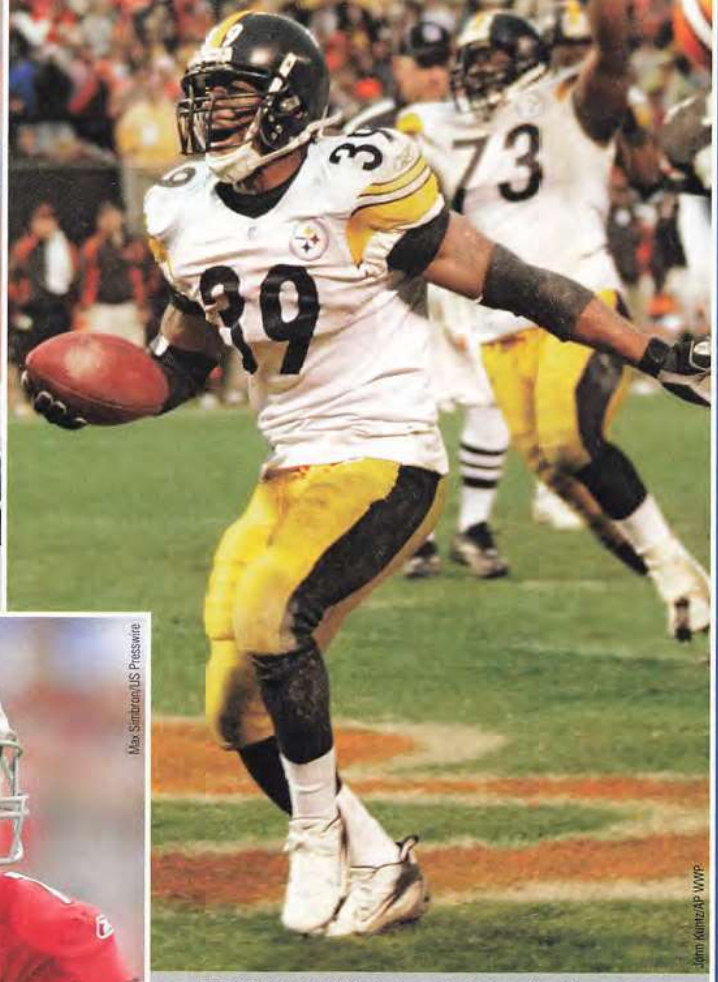
Jeff Hanisch/US Presswire

▲ AHEAD OF THE PACK. Bill Belichick looks on during the Patriots' 35-0 win at Green Bay.



Max Simmon/US Presswire

▲ A WORK OF LEIN-ART. Matt Leinart threw for 223 yards and one TD and ran for another score as Arizona edged Detroit.



John Kuntz/AP WWP

▲ PARKER'S LOT. Willie Parker celebrates after his touchdown grab in the final minute lifted the Steelers past Cleveland.

FEELING FINE IN FRISCO

Something good seemed to be taking shape in San Francisco, where the 49ers upended Seattle for their third straight win to move within a game of the NFC West-leading Seahawks. With a 5-5 mark, the team had already surpassed its win total from either of the previous two years. "We want to let everybody know the 49ers are coming on," said Frank Gore, who rushed for a team-record 212 yards and went over 1,000 yards for the season. Joe Nedney's field goals from 39 and 18 yards were sandwiched around an Alex Smith TD throw to Arnaz Battle and Smith's 1-yard scoring run as San Francisco built a 20-0 halftime lead. Seneca Wallace drew Seattle close by throwing second-half touchdowns to Deion Branch and Darren Jackson, but San Francisco's defense stiffened in the final minutes, stopping one drive on downs and another when Walt Harris grabbed his second interception of the day. "I think we've gained some respect," said linebacker Brandon Moore, who had six solo stops in the victory.

EXCERPTS FROM WEEK 11

The Saints' Drew Brees threw for 510 yards, the sixth-highest total in NFL history, but Cincinnati still came away with a 31-16 decision. Chad Johnson caught three touchdowns for the Bengals, all part of his 190-yard receiving day…Travis Henry sprinted for a 70-yard TD run and Pacman Jones broke the game open with his 90-yard punt return for a score as Tennessee took the measure of the Eagles, 31-13…Jamal Lewis ran for three touchdowns as AFC North-leading Baltimore improved to 8-2 for the first time in franchise history with a 24-10 win over Atlanta…Jason Taylor equaled an NFL record for TDs by a defensive lineman, getting the seventh of his career on a 51-yard interception return during Miami's 24-20 victory over the Vikings…Cadillac Williams rushed for 122 yards and Bruce Gradkowski threw a tie-breaking 34-yard touchdown pass to Joey Galloway in the fourth quarter, sparking Tampa Bay's 20-17 win over Washington.

WEEK 11

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SUNDAY, NOV. 19

@ Arizona 17 ..... Detroit 10
@ Baltimore 24 ..... Atlanta 10
Buffalo 24 ..... @ Houston 21
@ Carolina 15 ..... St. Louis 0
Chicago 10 ..... @ N.Y. Jets 0
Cincinnati 31 ..... @ New Orleans 16
@ Dallas 21 ..... Indianapolis 14
@ Kansas City 17 ..... Oakland 13
@ Miami 24 ..... Minnesota 20
New England 35 ..... @ Green Bay 0
Pittsburgh 24 ..... @ Cleveland 20
@ San Francisco 20 ..... Seattle 14
@ Tampa Bay 20 ..... Washington 17
Tennessee 31 ..... @ Philadelphia 13
San Diego 35 ..... @ Denver 27

MONDAY, NOV. 20

@ Jacksonville 26 ..... N.Y. Giants 10

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

LaDainian Tomlinson (RB, Chargers): 20 carries for 105 yards and three catches for 75 yards, while scoring four times and going over 100 career touchdowns, to ignite win at Denver.

DEFENSE

Jason Taylor (DE, Dolphins): Five tackles, one sack, two forced fumbles, and a 51-yard interception return for a TD that clinched win over Vikings.

SPECIAL TEAMS

B.J. Sams (KR, Ravens): Averaged 40.3 yards on punt returns and 30.3 yards on kickoff returns and set up two TDs in victory against Falcons.

OFFENSE

Frank Gore (RB, 49ers): Carried ball 24 times for 212 yards (8.8 average), marking his fifth 100-yard game of the season, to help defeat Seattle.

DEFENSE

Mike Rucker (DE, Panthers): Keyed the 15-0 shutout of St. Louis with two sacks, one that went for a safety, and three quarterback hurries.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Mat McBriar (P, Cowboys): In win over Colts, averaged 46.7 yards on three punts, placing two inside the 20 with none of his kicks returned.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Santonio Holmes (WR, Steelers): Five catches for 75 yards, a 20-yard TD among them, in win over Browns.

Lucky number 6
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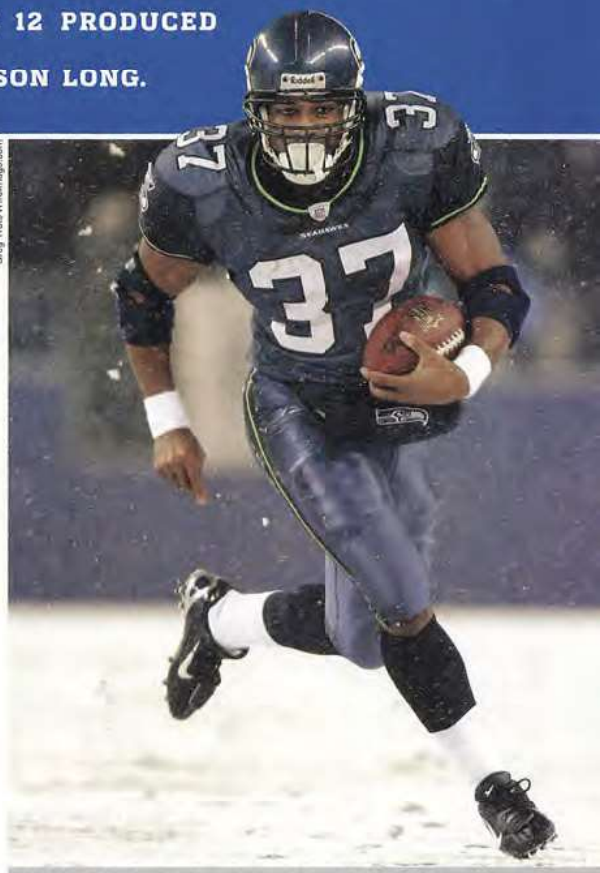
WEEK 12 FESTIVITIES ARE ALL PART OF THE FUN

FROM THE LEAGUE'S FIRST MODERN-DAY THANKSGIVING TRIPLEHEADER TO UNFORGETTABLE COMEBACKS AND SPECTACULAR ROOKIE EFFORTS, WEEK 12 PRODUCED SOME OF THE MOST GRIPPING GRID ACTION SEEN ALL SEASON LONG.



Greg Trott/Wirelmage.com

▲ **SNOW TRACKS. Seattle's Shaun Alexander is on the move for a chunk of his 201 rushing yards against the Packers.**

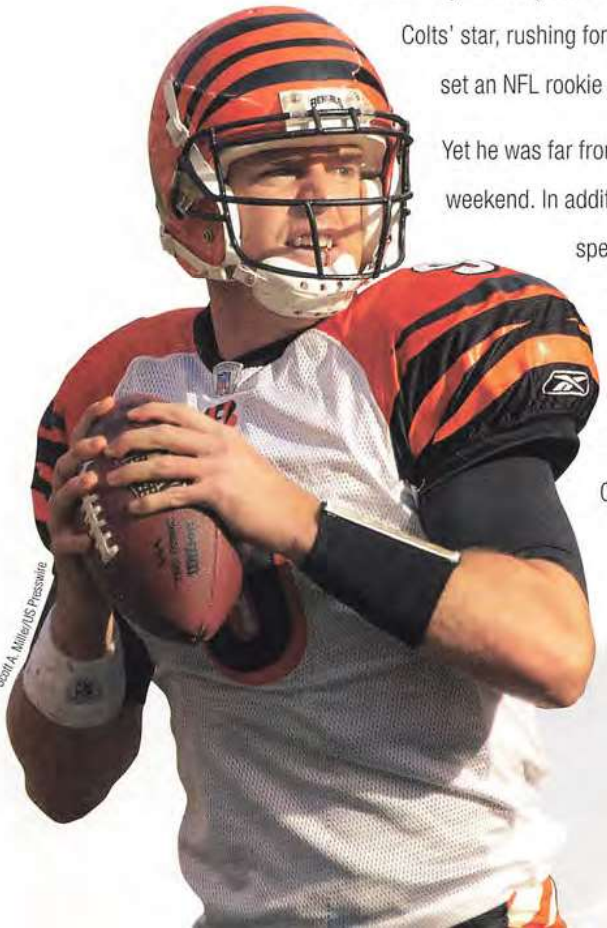
All four AFC division leaders were victorious, starting with the Patriots, who held on to their two-game edge in the East by knocking off the Bears, 17-13. Tom Brady engineered a tie-breaking fourth-quarter drive, running for a pair of crucial first downs before throwing a 2-yard touchdown pass to Benjamin Watson with 8:22 to play. Chicago drew close on Robbie Gould's 33-yard field goal, but Asante Samuel grabbed his third interception of the game to stop the Bears' final threat as New England improved to 8-3.

Baltimore's defense was lethal in blanking the Steelers, collecting nine sacks and forcing three turnovers, including a third-quarter fumble that Adalius Thomas returned 57 yards for a touchdown. The 27-0 triumph lifted the North-leading Ravens to 9-2.

LaDainian Tomlinson was again in the middle of San Diego's success, running for two touchdowns and also throwing a TD pass to Antonio Gates in a 21-14 victory over the Raiders that kept the Chargers two games ahead of the pack in the West.

Indianapolis pushed its league-best record to 10-1—and built a four-game cushion in the South—by handling the Eagles, 45-21. Joseph Addai was the Colts' star, rushing for 171 yards and scoring four times to set an NFL rookie record for points in a game (24).

Yet he was far from the only rookie standout on the weekend. In addition to Vince Young, whose heroics spearheaded Tennessee's big rally that knocked off the N.Y. Giants, fellow first-year quarterback Matt Leinart threw for a Week 12-best 405 yards, completing 31 of 51 passes in the Cardinals' contest at Minnesota.



Scott A. Miller/US Presswire

◀ **EARNING HIS STRIPES. Carson Palmer looks downfield during his 275-yard, three-TD effort in the Bengals' shutout of Cleveland.**

TITANIC RALLY

The Titans fought their way back from a three-TD deficit over the final 9:35 to stun the Giants, 24-21. After Vince Young threw for two touchdowns and ran for another, Rob Bironas capped the biggest comeback in franchise history—and the biggest in the NFL since 2003—by kicking a 49-yard field goal. The Giants had built a seemingly safe 21-0 lead before momentum shifted early in the fourth quarter. Young had a 4-yard scoring toss to tight end Bo Scaife and the QB's 1-yard run pulled Tennessee within 21-14. He then tied the game on a 14-yard pass to Brandon Jones with 44 seconds to go, which was followed by a Pacman Jones interception that set up Bironas' winning kick. "Rookies aren't supposed to do stuff like that, but that's Vince," said Scaife. "Vince is not a quitter, and nobody on this team is either."

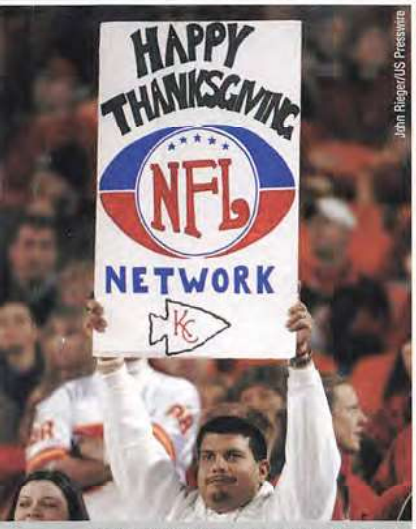
"CLASSIC SHAUN ALEXANDER."

–Seattle fullback Mack Strong, after watching his teammate run for 201 yards on a franchise-record 40 carries in a win over Green Bay.

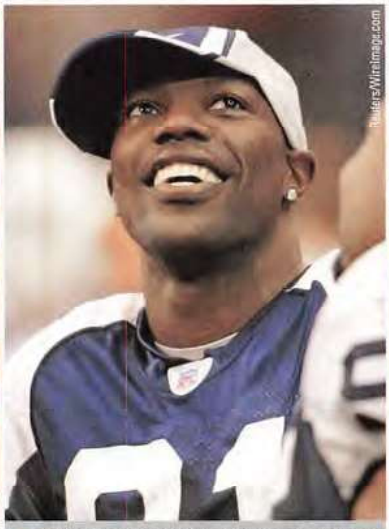
▲ ON THE MARCH. Coach Sean Payton had the Saints atop the NFC South.

▲ TRUE SHOWMAN. John Fogerty played at halftime in both Denver and Kansas City.

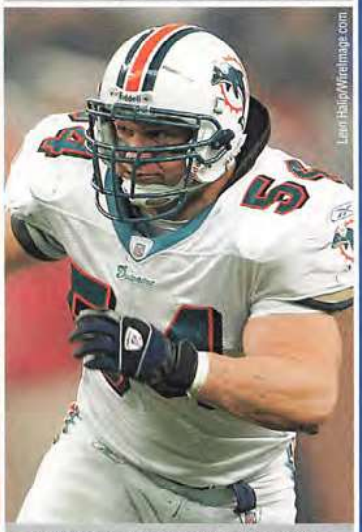
▲ MARK IT. Indy's Joseph Addai takes a rest during his record-breaking game.



▲ FOR DESSERT. The NFL's Thanksgiving plate was capped with Broncos-Chiefs.



▲ EIGHT IS ENOUGH. Terrell Owens had eight receptions, including a TD, in Dallas' win.



▲ ZACH THE SACK. Zach Thomas got to the QB twice in Miami's win at Detroit.

A HAPPENING HOLIDAY

It began with former greats Emmitt Smith, Harry Carson, Wayne Chrebet, and Eric Dickerson riding in the NFL float at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and ended with the inaugural NFL Network telecast of a regular-season game. Along the way, there were in-stadium performances by John Fogerty, Kelly Clarkson, Carrie Underwood, and Taylor Swift…along with some fabulous football. Miami and Dallas won the early games, and Kansas City closed out the day's action by hosting Denver in front of the largest Arrowhead Stadium crowd in 34 years, though the Chiefs dedicated their 19-10 victory to someone not in attendance: team owner Lamar Hunt. "This win is for you," said QB Trent Green, in honor of the beloved 74-year-old owner who listened from a hospital bed in Dallas (Hunt would pass away one month later from prostate cancer). Hunt had long pressed the NFL to bring a Thanksgiving game to Kansas City and finally got his wish. "This has been important to him really going back to the AFL days," said his son, Clark Hunt. "He's worked since the merger to try to get the game back here." NFL rushing leader Larry Johnson gained 157 yards on 34 carries, and Lawrence Tynes made field goals from 24, 34, 29, and 21 yards as the Chiefs won for the fifth time in their last six games and moved into a tie for second place with Denver in the AFC West.

WEEK 12 TWEAKS

Drew Brees had his fifth straight 300-yard game, throwing for 349 yards and two touchdowns as the Saints beat Atlanta, 31-13, to take over first place in the NFC South…Tony Romo continued his torrid play, hitting on 22 of 29 passes for 306 yards and five touchdowns in Dallas' 38-10 win over Tampa Bay. The victory put the Cowboys alone in first place in the NFC East…Marc Bulger's 5-yard touchdown pass to Kevin Curtis with 27 seconds to play gave the Rams a 20-17 win over the 49ers. The St. Louis QB was a perfect 9-of-9 for 66 yards on the winning drive…Rian Lindell kicked a 42-yard FG as time expired to lift the Bills over Jacksonville, 27-24…Kevin Kaesviharn and Tory James each intercepted two passes as Cincinnati recorded its first shutout in 17 seasons, 30-0 over Cleveland.

WEEK 12

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

THURSDAY, NOV. 23

@ Dallas 38.....Tampa Bay 10
@ Kansas City 19.....Denver 10
Miami 27.....@ Detroit 10

SUNDAY, NOV. 26

@ Baltimore 27.....Pittsburgh 0
@ Buffalo 27.....Jacksonville 24
Cincinnati 30.....@ Cleveland 0
@ Minnesota 31.....Arizona 26
@ New England 17.....Chicago 13
New Orleans 31.....@ Atlanta 13
@ N.Y. Jets 26.....Houston 11
@ St. Louis 20.....San Francisco 17
@ San Diego 21.....Oakland 14
@ Tennessee 24.....N.Y. Giants 21
@ Washington 17.....Carolina 13
@ Indianapolis 45.....Philadelphia 21

MONDAY, NOV. 27

@ Seattle 34.....Green Bay 24

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Joseph Addai (RB, Colts): 24 carries for 171 yards (7.1 average) and four TDs, along with a pair of receptions, in victory over Philadelphia.

DEFENSE

Asante Samuel (CB, Patriots): Notched team's first three-interception game in 23 years, helping secure win over Bears in battle of division leaders.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Roscoe Parrish (WR-PR, Bills): Had 82-yard punt return for a TD and caught a pass to set up game-winning field goal to defeat Jacksonville.

OFFENSE

Tony Romo (QB, Cowboys): Completed 22 of 29 passes (75.9 percent) with five TDs and a 148.9 passer rating in Thanksgiving Day win over Tampa.

DEFENSE

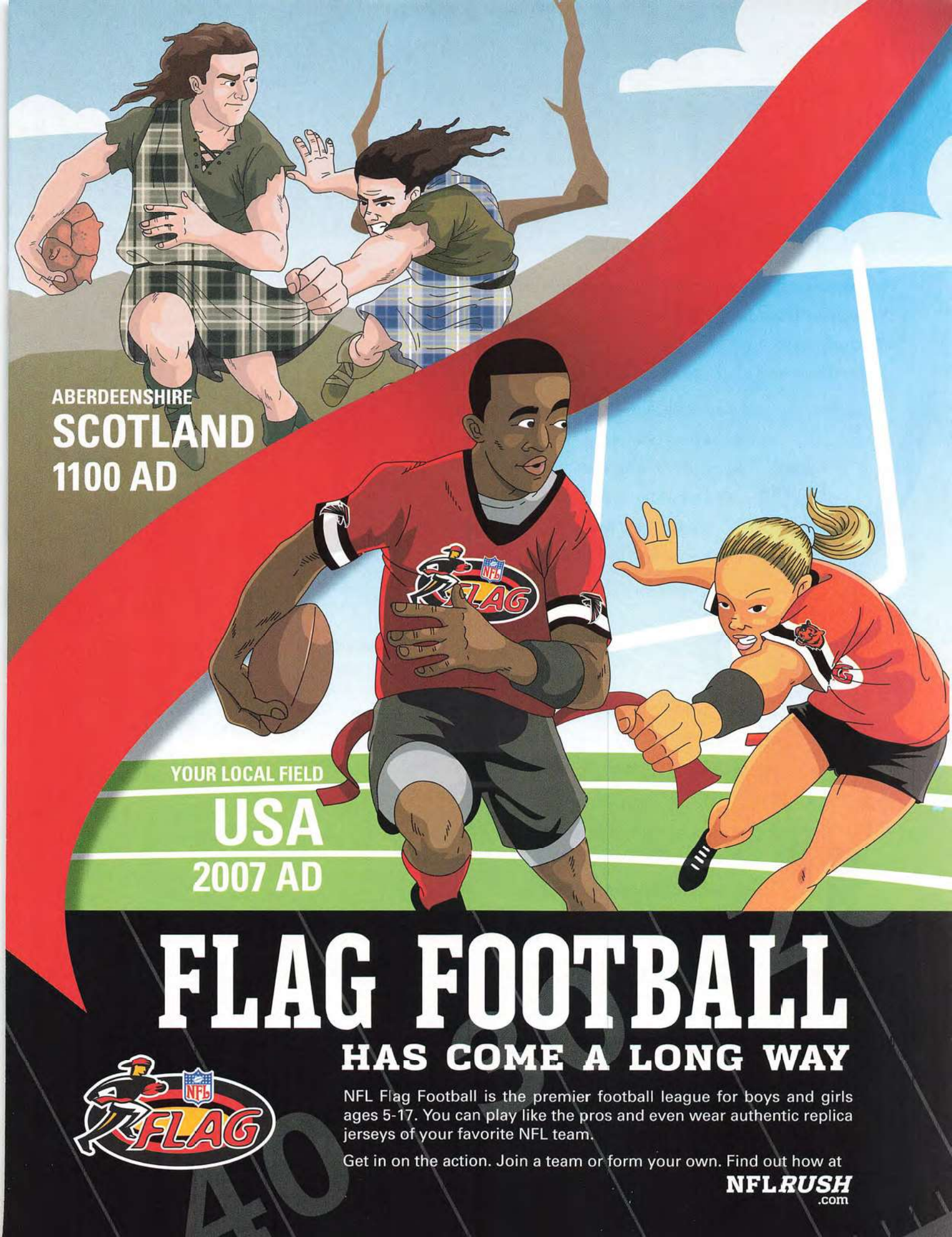
Sean Taylor (S, Redskins): Made six tackles and clinched triumph over Panthers by grabbing an end-zone interception with 1:10 remaining.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Josh Brown (K, Seahawks): On a snowy night in Seattle, made all four of his FG attempts—from 45, 41, 37, and 28 yards—in win over Green Bay.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Vince Young (QB, Titans): Threw for 249 yards and had a 107.9 passer rating in comeback win over Giants.



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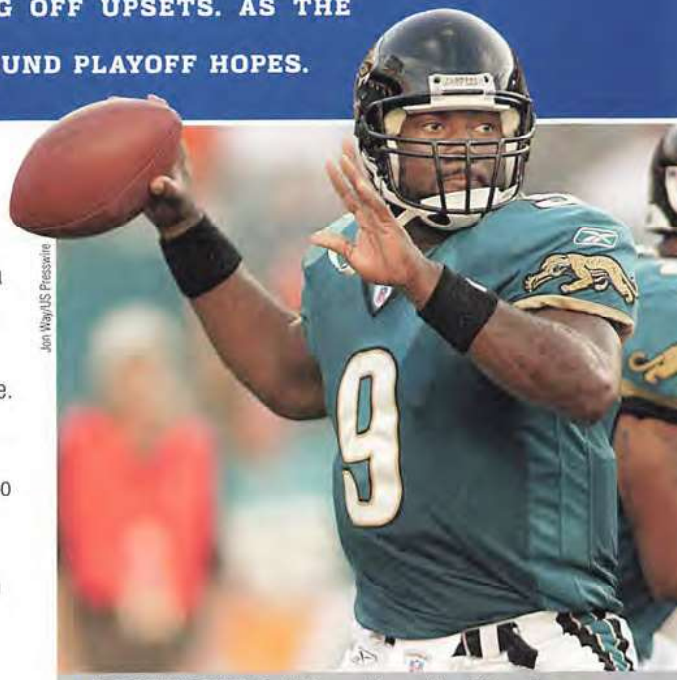
WEEK 13 STRETCH DRIVE KICKS INTO FULL GEAR

LATE FIELD GOALS PROVED HUGE IN DETERMINING THE WEEK'S WINNERS, IN SOME CASES SOLIDIFYING DIVISION LEADS AND IN OTHERS CAPPING OFF UPSETS. AS THE STRETCH RUN TOOK HOLD, 30 TEAMS STILL KICKED AROUND PLAYOFF HOPES.



Jon Wayl/US Presswire

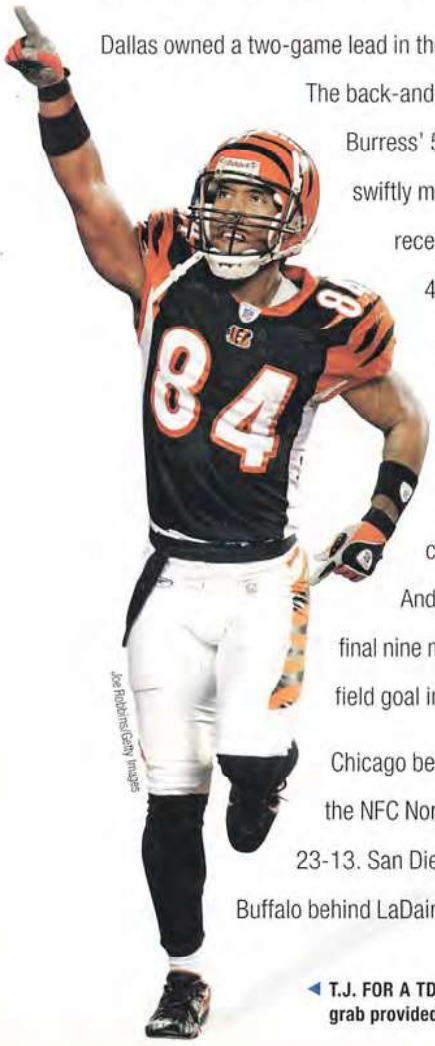
▲ **STATE-MENT GAME. David Garrard tossed two TDs as the Jaguars beat their in-state rivals, the Dolphins, 24-10.**

Four games were decided on last-second or overtime field goals, led by Seattle's 23-20 triumph at Denver. The NFC West leaders erupted for 16 fourth-quarter points, with Shaun Alexander's 1-yard TD run followed by three Josh Brown field goals, the last a 50-yarder with five seconds to play that marked his fourth game-winning kick of the year.

Dallas owned a two-game lead in the NFC East after edging the Giants by a 23-20 score. The back-and-forth affair saw New York tie the game on Plaxico Burress' 5-yard TD catch with 1:06 remaining, but Tony Romo swiftly marched the Cowboys to the New York 29, where recently signed Martin Gramatica split the uprights from 46 yards out for the deciding points.

The Titans rallied from a double-figure deficit for the second straight week to hand the Colts a rare loss. With seven seconds to go, Rob Bironas hit a 60-yard field goal—becoming just the sixth NFL kicker to connect from that far—to produce a 20-17 win. Derek Anderson rallied the Browns with a pair of TD passes in the final nine minutes of regulation and Phil Dawson made a 33-yard field goal in overtime, providing a 31-28 win over Kansas City.

Chicago became the first team to secure a playoff berth, winning the NFC North for the second straight year by clipping the Vikings, 23-13. San Diego didn't clinch, but did win its sixth in a row, beating Buffalo behind LaDainian Tomlinson's 178 rushing yards and two TDs.



Joe Robbins/Getty Images

◀ **T.J. FOR A TD. T.J. Houshmandzadeh's 40-yard scoring grab provided the decisive points in Cincinnati's 13-7 win.**

BUSH'S BREAKOUT LIFTS SAINTS

Reggie Bush tied a franchise record by scoring four times and helped New Orleans maintain a two-game lead in the NFC South by overpowering the 49ers, 34-10. The rookie rushed for three TDs and caught a fourth while accumulating 168 total yards—131 on his nine receptions and 37 more on 10 rushing attempts. San Francisco had pulled within 14-10 before the Saints' Mike McKenzie intercepted an Alex Smith pass, leading to John Carney's 19-yard field goal. McKenzie then picked off Smith a second time, and New Orleans again capitalized as Bush caught a 5-yard TD on a shovel pass from Drew Brees that pushed the margin to 24-10. Bush later added a 74-yard reception to set up his final touchdown of the day. "At some point the athlete takes over and there's only so much you can draw on the drawing

WEEK 13 STANDINGS

*clinched division title

AFC EAST	W-L-T	PF	PA
New England	9-3-0	281	165
N.Y. Jets	7-5-0	241	238
Buffalo	5-7-0	212	249
Miami	5-7-0	207	212

AFC NORTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
Baltimore	9-3-0	256	160
Cincinnati	7-5-0	290	240
Pittsburgh	5-7-0	259	257
Cleveland	4-8-0	201	266

AFC SOUTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
Indianapolis	10-2-0	325	251
Jacksonville	7-5-0	259	174
Tennessee	5-7-0	221	294
Houston	4-8-0	199	270

AFC WEST	W-L-T	PF	PA
San Diego	10-2-0	377	237
Denver	7-5-0	215	188
Kansas City	7-5-0	257	236
Oakland	2-10-0	146	242

NFC EAST	W-L-T	PF	PA
Dallas	8-4-0	332	218
N.Y. Giants	6-6-0	265	255
Philadelphia	6-6-0	294	263
Washington	4-8-0	213	274

NFC NORTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
Chicago*	10-2-0	318	150
Minnesota	5-7-0	211	231
Green Bay	4-8-0	219	324
Detroit	2-10-0	216	294

NFC SOUTH	W-L-T	PF	PA
New Orleans	8-4-0	310	251
Atlanta	6-6-0	227	250
Carolina	6-6-0	213	217
Tampa Bay	3-9-0	145	272

NFC WEST	W-L-T	PF	PA
Seattle	8-4-0	260	263
St. Louis	5-7-0	242	287
San Francisco	5-7-0	209	319
Arizona	3-9-0	221	284

Joe Robbins/Getty Images

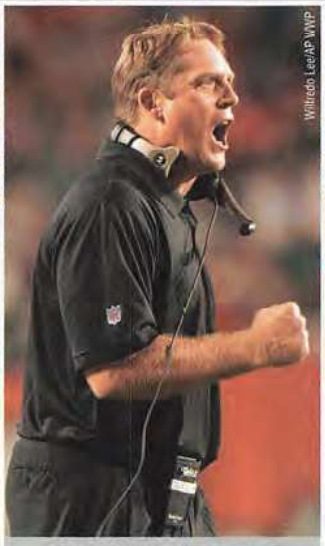
Rich Kane/US Presswire

Mark J. Rebilas/US Presswire

▲ **HAPPY FEATS.** (Left to right) **Tennessee's Rob Bironas (No. 2) and Craig Hentrich, Dallas' Martin Gramatica (No. 7) and Jason Witten, and Seattle's Josh Brown (No. 3) and Ryan Plackemeier celebrate last-second field goals that won Week 13 thrillers.**

Kevin C. Cox/Wirelmage.com

▲ **STARS GAZING. The 49ers' Alex Smith (l) chats with New Orleans' Reggie Bush.**


Wilfredo Lee/AP WWP

▲ **ALL JACKED UP. Jack Del Rio saw his Jaguars improve to 7-5.**

Steve Amenoff/AP WWP

▲ **PATS ON THE BACK. Tedy Bruschi (l) and Mike Vrabel enjoy New England's victory.**

board," said Brees, who completed 17 of 28 passes for 186 yards. "The fans were all waiting for that breakout game where [Reggie] just takes the game over." With the win, the Saints moved closer to their first playoff appearance since 2000, when they captured the NFC West title.

PHILLY FINDS ITS FOOTING

Jeff Garcia threw for 312 yards and three touchdowns and Lito Sheppard's end zone interception stopped a final Panthers threat, leading Philadelphia to a 27-24 victory that congested the NFC Wild Card race. With the Eagles trailing in the fourth quarter, Garcia's 40-yard touchdown pass to Reggie Brown knotted the game at 24-24. Brian Dawkins then intercepted a pass on Carolina's next possession to set up David Akers' decisive 25-yard field goal with 3:13 remaining. "It's been a while since I felt this [good] about a game, the way we played," said Garcia, who posted a 105.9 passer rating. "We never gave up, and scratched and clawed for every inch out there." Philly's win created a four-team logjam for the Wild Card lead, with three other teams just one game behind.

WEEK 13 THOUGHTS

The AFC Wild Card was just as tight with five teams sandwiched in at 7-5, among them Week 13 winners Cincinnati, Jacksonville, and the N.Y. Jets. The Bengals came within two minutes of their second straight shutout before settling for a 13-7 victory over AFC North-leading Baltimore, while the Jaguars beat Miami, 24-10, behind two David Garrard touchdown passes and a defense that produced four sacks and a pair of interceptions. The Jets, infused by three second-quarter touchdown drives of 70 yards or longer, shot out to a 31-0 halftime lead en route to a 38-10 verdict at Green Bay. Cedric Houston rushed for 105 yards and scored two times in the win …Atlanta erupted for the game's final 24 points to overcome a two-TD deficit and defeat Washington, 24-14. The Falcons rushed for 256 yards, highlighted by a 69-yard scoring run from Jerious Norwood…The Patriots rallied with 15-fourth quarter points, getting the game-winner on Corey Dillon's 4-yard run with 2:33 remaining, to edge Detroit, 28-21… Edgerrin James rushed for 115 yards and Marcel Shipp scored three times in Arizona's 34-20 win over St. Louis.

WEEK 13

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

THURSDAY, NOV. 30

@ Cincinnati 13 ..... Baltimore 7

SUNDAY, DEC. 3

Arizona 34 ..... @ St. Louis 20
Atlanta 24 ..... @ Washington 14
@ Chicago 23 ..... Minnesota 13
@ Cleveland 31 .. Kansas City 28 (OT)
Dallas 23 ..... @ N.Y. Giants 20
Houston 23 ..... @ Oakland 14
Jacksonville 24 ..... @ Miami 10
@ New England 28 ..... Detroit 21
@ New Orleans 34 ... San Francisco 10
N.Y. Jets 38 ..... @ Green Bay 10
@ Pittsburgh 20 ..... Tampa Bay 3
San Diego 24 ..... @ Buffalo 21
@ Tennessee 20 ..... Indianapolis 17
Seattle 23 ..... @ Denver 20

MONDAY, DEC. 4

@ Philadelphia 27 ..... Carolina 24

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

David Garrard (QB, Jaguars): Threw for 229 yards and two touchdowns while posting a 136.4 passer rating in victory at Miami.

DEFENSE

DeMeco Ryans (LB, Texans): Had 15 tackles, a fumble recovery, a forced fumble, a sack, and a game-clinching interception in win at Oakland.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Rob Bironas (K, Titans): Hit 60-yard field goal, longest in franchise history, to cap 14-point comeback that beat Colts; also made 25-yard FG in win.

OFFENSE

Reggie Bush (RB, Saints): In victory over 49ers, became first NFL player in 39 years to score three rushing TDs and also have 100 yards receiving.

DEFENSE

Lawyer Milloy (S, Falcons): Made 12 tackles, had three QB hurries, and defensed two passes, allowing Atlanta to rally past Washington.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Devin Hester (CB-PR-KR, Bears): Opened scoring in division-clinching win over Vikings with 45-yard punt return, his fourth return TD of season.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Vince Young (QB, Titans): Threw for 163 yards and two TDs and ran for another 78 yards to help beat Indy.

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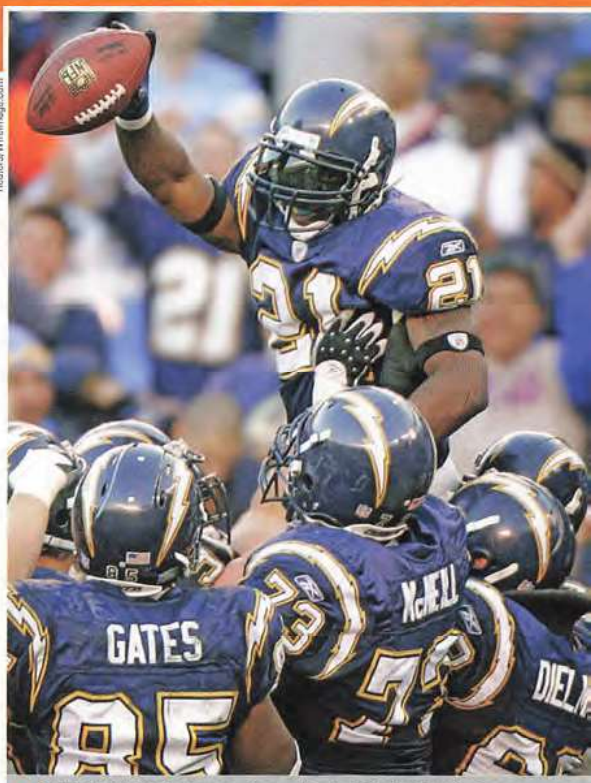
WEEK 14 RUNNING RIGHT INTO THE RECORD BOOK

BY MAKING THEIR WAY INTO THE END ZONE SO OFTEN, SAN DIEGO'S LADAINIAN TOMLINSON AND CHICAGO'S DEVIN HESTER FOUND THEMSELVES ACHIEVING NFL HISTORY WHILE ALSO LEADING THEIR PLAYOFF-BOUND TEAMS TO VICTORY.

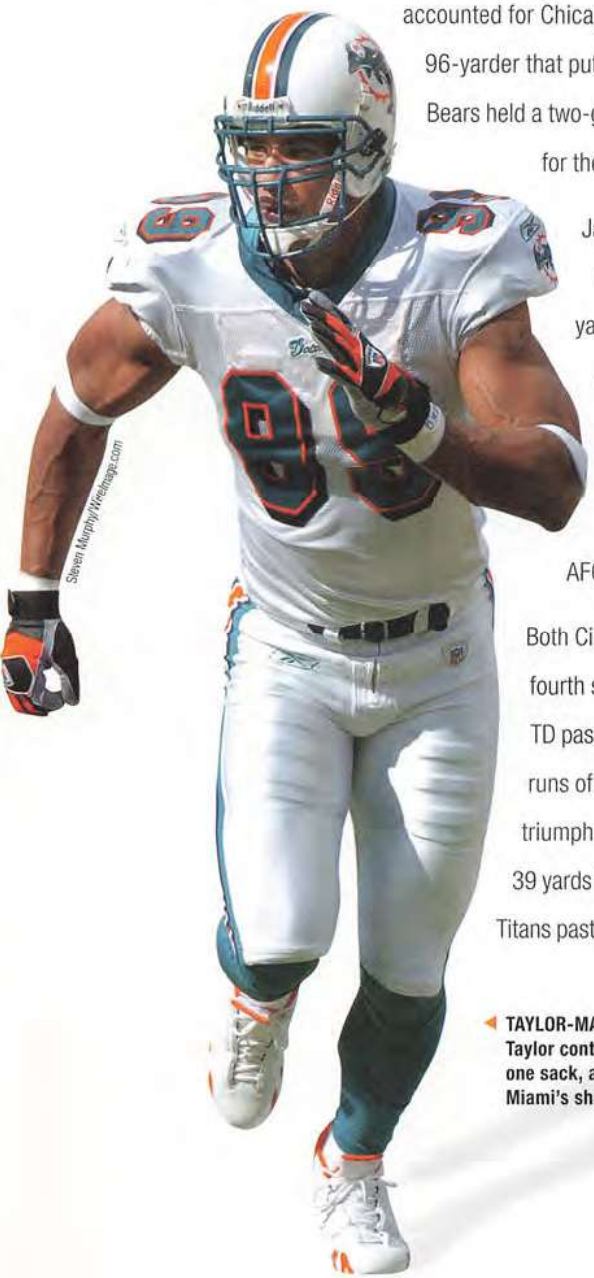


Reuters/Wirelmage.com

▲ **SUPER CHARGED. Teammates salute LaDainian Tomlinson after his record-breaking 29th touchdown of the season.**

Tomlinson shattered the league record for touchdowns in a season, scoring three times as part of the Chargers' 48-20 win over Denver that wrapped up the AFC West title. His third TD of the game, a 7-yard run late in the fourth quarter, was No. 29 on the year as he surpassed the mark set by Shaun Alexander in 2005. It also put an exclamation point on the Chargers' seventh straight triumph as they improved to 11-2, best in the AFC.

Hester ran back two kickoffs for scores, the second giving him his record-breaking sixth return touchdown of the season, in the Bears' 42-27 win at St. Louis. His 94-yard return accounted for Chicago's first points, and he later added a 96-yarder that put the game out of reach. At 11-2, the Bears held a two-game lead over New Orleans in the fight for the NFC's best record.


Steven Murphy/Wirelmage.com

◀ **TAYLOR-MADE TRIUMPH. Jason Taylor contributed six tackles, one sack, and a forced fumble in Miami's shutout of the Patriots.**

Jacksonville put on a stunning ground display of its own, rushing for 375 yards—tied for the second-highest total since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger and the most in six seasons—in a 44-17 victory over Indianapolis. By winning, the Jaguars trimmed the Colts' lead in the AFC South to just two games.

Both Cincinnati and Tennessee won for the fourth straight week. Carson Palmer threw two TD passes and Rudi Johnson contributed scoring runs of 9 and 6 yards to key the Bengals' 27-10 triumph over Oakland, while Vince Young darted 39 yards for the winning TD in overtime to push the Titans past the Texans, 26-20.

RAVENS CLAW CLOSER

Baltimore became the first visiting team in a decade to win a December game at Arrowhead Stadium, defeating the Chiefs, 20-10, to move a step closer to clinching the AFC North. Steve McNair connected on 21 of 27 passes for 283 yards and threw the longest TD of his career, an 87-yarder to Mark Clayton that made it 13-0 midway through the third quarter. Matt Stover kicked a pair of field goals, including the 400th of his career, and Jamal Lewis contributed a touchdown run as part of his 81-yard day. Defensively, Ed Reed grabbed a pair of interceptions and helped keep Kansas City out of the end zone until the final two minutes. "Our defense is well-orchestrated. They've got a lot of pride in what they do," said Ravens head coach Brian Billick. "They don't like giving up plays." Through 13 games, Baltimore was allowing just 13.1 ppg, the fewest in the AFC.

"WE HAD TO INTRODUCE OURSELVES."

~Minnesota QB Brad Johnson, joking about knowing teammate Artose Pinner, who had nine carries all season before rushing for 125 yards in a win over the Lions.

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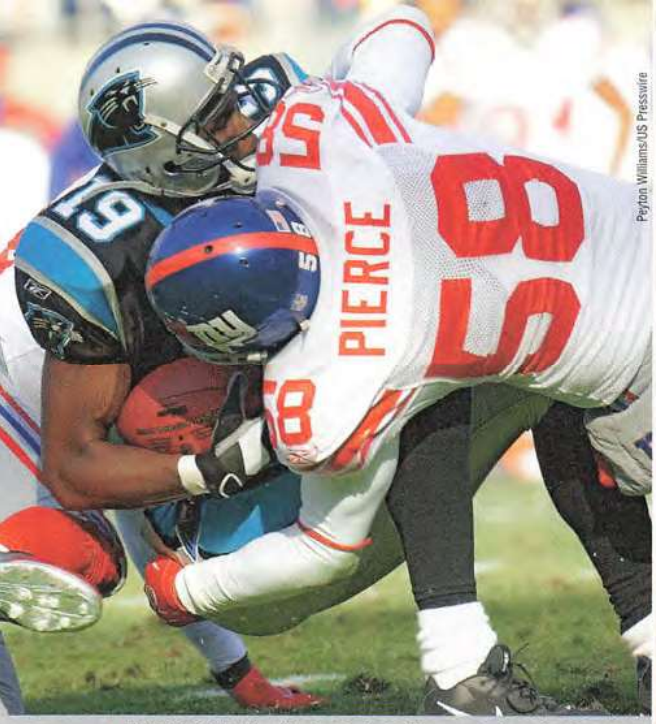
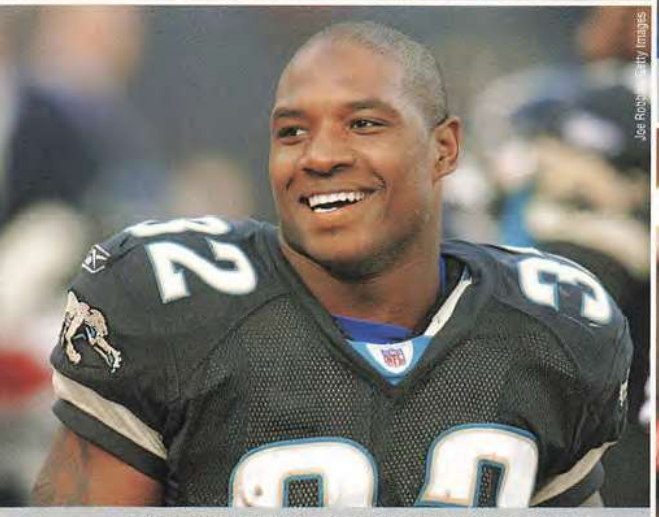


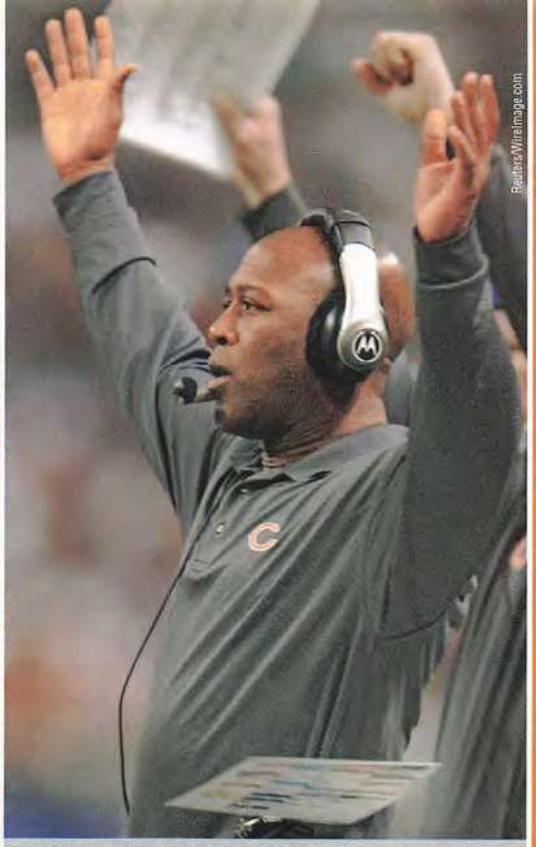
Peyton Williams/US Presswire

▲ PIERCING HIT. The Giants' Antonio Pierce subdues Keyshawn Johnson for one of his 11 tackles during a win over Carolina.



Joe Robbins/Getty Images

▲ JAGUARS ON A RUN. Maurice Jones-Drew was part of an offense that rolled up 375 rushing yards while beating Indy.



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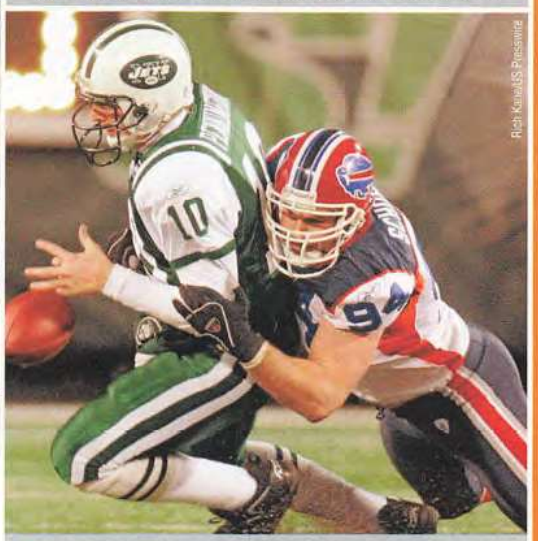
▲ GOTTA' LOVE IT. Chicago head coach Lovie Smith helps out with a TD call during his team's triumph at St. Louis.



Rich Kane/US Presswire

▲ GROUNDED JET. Aaron Schobel tackles Chad Pennington for one of his three sacks in Buffalo's win over the Jets.

DIVIDED DIVISIONS

New Orleans raced past Dallas, 42-17, behind Drew Brees' five TD passes and Deuce McAllister's 111 rushing yards. The Saints' victory kept their NFC South lead at two games, while the Cowboys dropped to 8-5 and saw their NFC East lead shrink to one game ahead of the Giants and Eagles. Jeremy Shockey's 2-yard TD catch from Eli Manning snapped a second-quarter tie as the Giants beat the Panthers, 27-13. "Eli did a great job, directing us and leading us out there," said Tiki Barber, who rushed for 112 yards and went over 10,000 yards for his career. Jeff Garcia threw two touchdown passes as Philly built an 18-point halftime lead and then held on for a 21-19 win at Washington. Two other division leaders—New England and Seattle—were tripped up on the weekend. The Patriots could have built a three-game bulge in the AFC East, but fell at Miami, 21-0, marking the Dolphins' first shutout in the series since 1972. Seattle had a shot to wrap up the NFC West, but lost at Arizona, 27-21. Matt Leinart's 5-yard TD pass to Larry Fitzgerald early in the fourth quarter put the Cardinals ahead for good.

FOCUSED ON 14

Willie Parker set a franchise record with 223 rushing yards in Pittsburgh's 27-7 win over Cleveland… Buffalo scored on Lee Evans' 77-yard reception, Willis McGahee's 57-yard run, and Nate Clements' 58-yard interception return to beat the Jets, 31-13… Demorrio Williams' 54-yard fumble return for a touchdown lifted Atlanta over Tampa Bay, 17-6.

WEEK 14

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

THURSDAY, DEC. 7

@ Pittsburgh 27 .....Cleveland 7

SUNDAY, DEC. 10

@ Arizona 27.....Seattle 21
Atlanta 17 .....@ Tampa Bay 6
Baltimore 20.....@ Kansas City 10
Buffalo 31.....@ N.Y. Jets 13
@ Cincinnati 27 .....Oakland 10
Green Bay 30 .....@ San Francisco 19
@ Jacksonville 44 .....Indianapolis 17
@ Miami 21.....New England 0
Minnesota 30.....@ Detroit 20
N.Y. Giants 27 .....@ Carolina 13
Philadelphia 21.....@ Washington 19
@ San Diego 48.....Denver 20
Tennessee 26 .....@ Houston 20 (OT)
New Orleans 42 .....@ Dallas 17

MONDAY, DEC. 11

Chicago 42 .....@ St. Louis 27

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

LaDainian Tomlinson (RB, Chargers): Scored three times to set NFL mark for TDs in a season (29) and finished game with 103 rushing yards in win over Denver that clinched AFC West.

DEFENSE

Aaron Schobel (DE, Bills): Contributed three sacks, nine total tackles, and a forced fumble in victory at N.Y. Jets.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Maurice Jones-Drew (KR-RB, Jaguars): Scored three TDs—one on a 93-yard kickoff return—and amassed 303 all-purpose yards in win over Colts.

OFFENSE

Drew Brees (QB, Saints): Topped 300 passing yards for sixth time in seven games (384), threw for five TDs, and had a 140.8 passer rating vs. Dallas.

DEFENSE

Cedric Griffin (CB, Vikings): Defensed three passes and had an interception, a forced fumble, and fumble recovery in victory at Detroit.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Devin Hester (CB-PR-KR, Bears): Returned two kickoffs for TDs (96 and 94 yards) and added a 21-yard punt return to spark victory at St. Louis.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Vince Young (QB, Titans): Threw for 218 yards and ran for 86, including the game-winning TD, at Houston.

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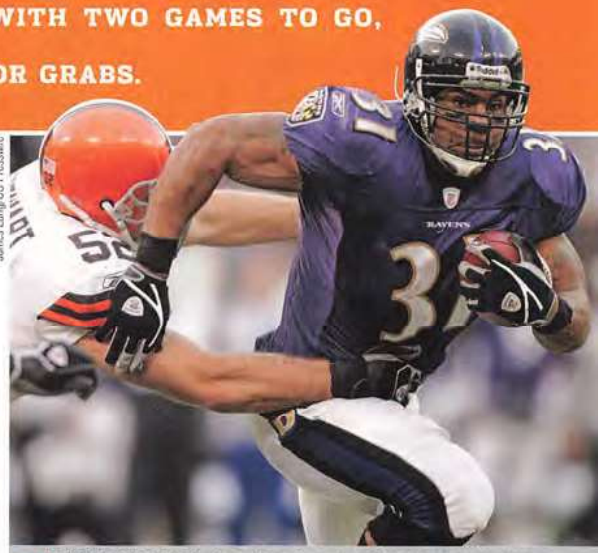
WEEK 15 PLAYOFF ORDERS STILL BEING TAKEN

EVEN IF THREE MORE DIVISION RACES WERE SETTLED, WEEK 15 SERVED TO RAISE HOPES FOR SEVERAL TEAMS HARBORING POSTSEASON DREAMS. WITH TWO GAMES TO GO, 24 CLUBS REMAINED ALIVE FOR THE SIX SPOTS STILL UP FOR GRABS.



James Lang/US Presswire

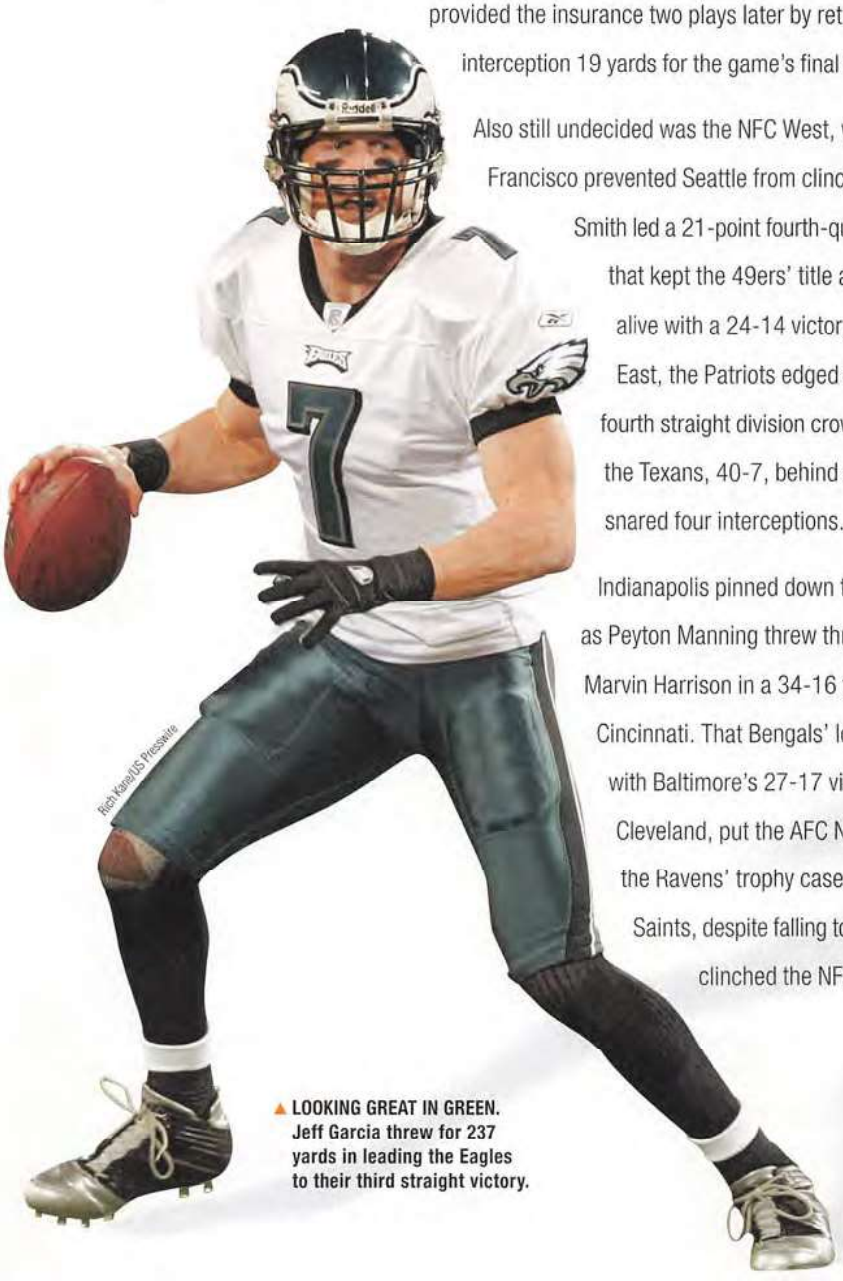
▲ BALTIMORE'S BACK. Jamal Lewis rushed for 109 yards and scored once as the Ravens clinched the AFC North crown.

The NFC East was shaping up as the most hotly contested division, with Dallas clinging to a one-game lead over Philadelphia as the teams prepared for a head-to-head showdown on Christmas Day. The Cowboys outpointed the Falcons, 38-28, as Tony Romo fired two touchdown passes and Marion Barber rushed for a pair of scores, including a 9-yarder late in the third quarter that put the visitors ahead for good.

At the Meadowlands, the Eagles rallied past the Giants, 36-22. Jeff Garcia connected with Reggie Brown for the go-ahead TD with less than three minutes to play, and Trent Cole provided the insurance two plays later by returning an interception 19 yards for the game's final touchdown.

Also still undecided was the NFC West, where San Francisco prevented Seattle from clinching. Alex Smith led a 21-point fourth-quarter outburst that kept the 49ers' title aspirations alive with a 24-14 victory. In the AFC East, the Patriots edged closer to their fourth straight division crown by handling the Texans, 40-7, behind a defense that snared four interceptions.

Indianapolis pinned down the AFC South as Peyton Manning threw three TDs to Marvin Harrison in a 34-16 triumph over Cincinnati. That Bengals' loss, combined with Baltimore's 27-17 victory over Cleveland, put the AFC North title in the Ravens' trophy case. And the Saints, despite falling to Washington, clinched the NFC South.



Rich Kane/US Presswire

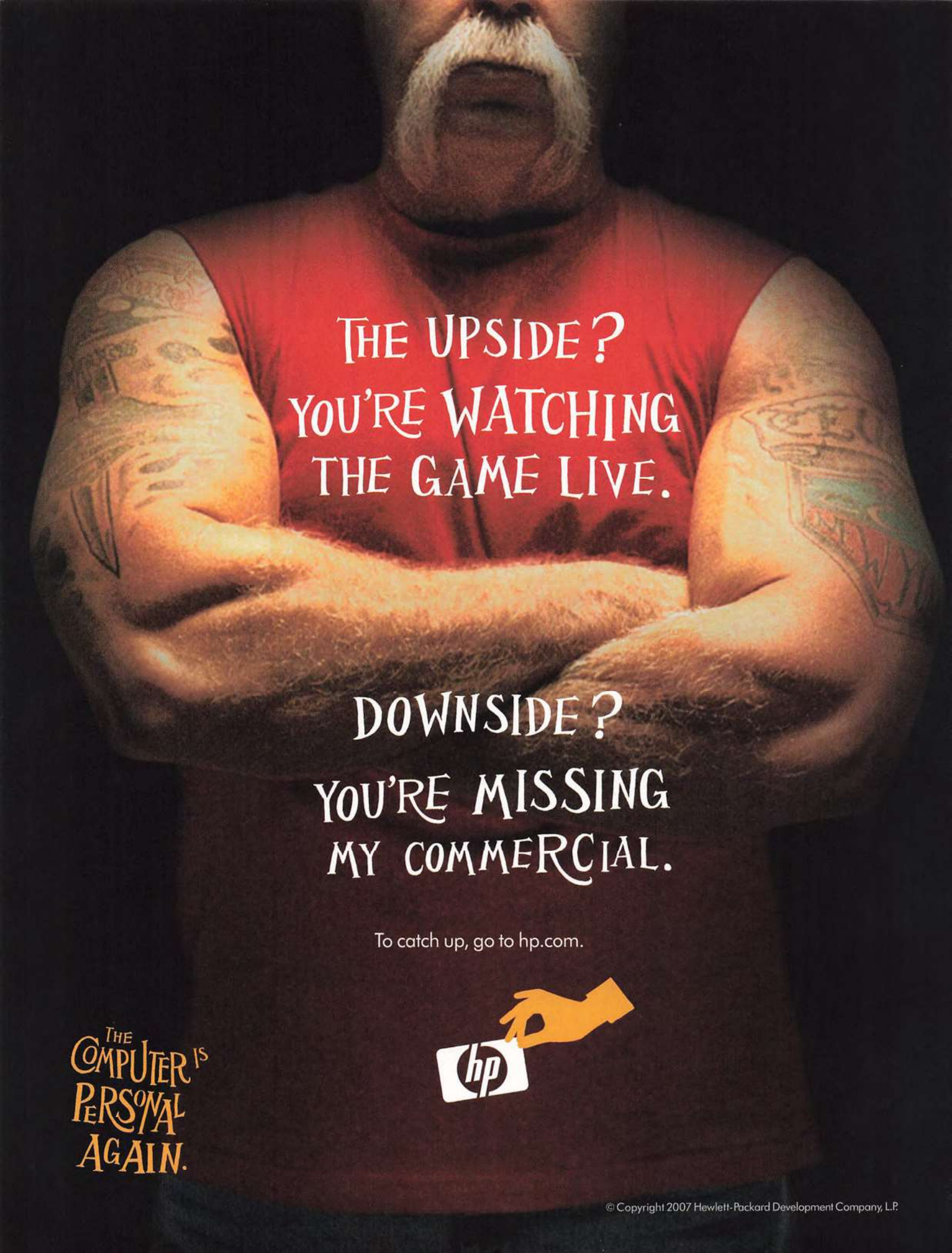
▲ LOOKING GREAT IN GREEN. Jeff Garcia threw for 237 yards in leading the Eagles to their third straight victory.

RECORD BOOK REVISIONS

More pages were ripped out of the NFL record book in Week 15 when at least six league marks were shattered. Michael Vick set the single-season rushing record for a quarterback, his 990 yards eclipsing the standard of 968 set by the Bears' Bobby Douglass in 1972. "It means a lot. It's everything I've worked for in my career," said Vick, who also threw a career-high four touchdown passes in the Falcons' loss to Dallas. "I'm disappointed that we didn't get the win, but it's [still] a milestone." In the same game, Morten Andersen became the NFL's all-time scoring leader. The Atlanta kicker hit four PATs, giving him 2,437 points, three more than Gary Anderson. "My next goal is to play until I'm 50," insisted the 24-year NFL veteran. In Green Bay, Brett Favre's 21-yard completion to Carlyle Holiday in the second quarter of a win over the Lions was the 4,968th of his career, bettering the mark held by Dan Marino. And San Diego's LaDainian Tomlinson continued his personal assault on the record book, setting three more NFL standards—points in a season (186), rushing touchdowns in a season (28), and consecutive multi-TD games (8)—while helping the Chargers take a 20-9 triumph over the Chiefs.

"THE BOY JUST BECAME A GROWN MAN TODAY."

~49ers running back Frank Gore on QB Alex Smith, who threw for two fourth-quarter TDs and ran for another to beat Seattle.



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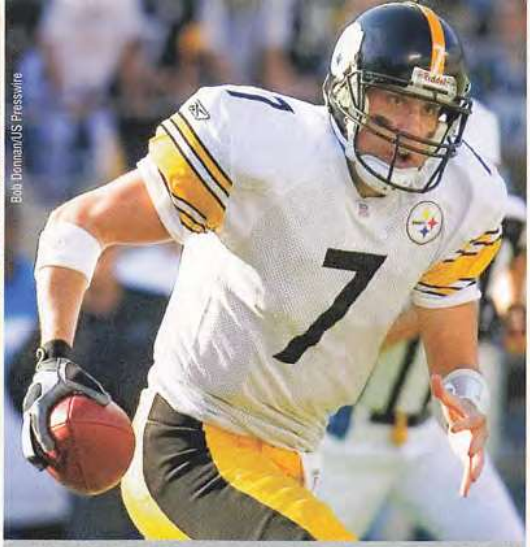
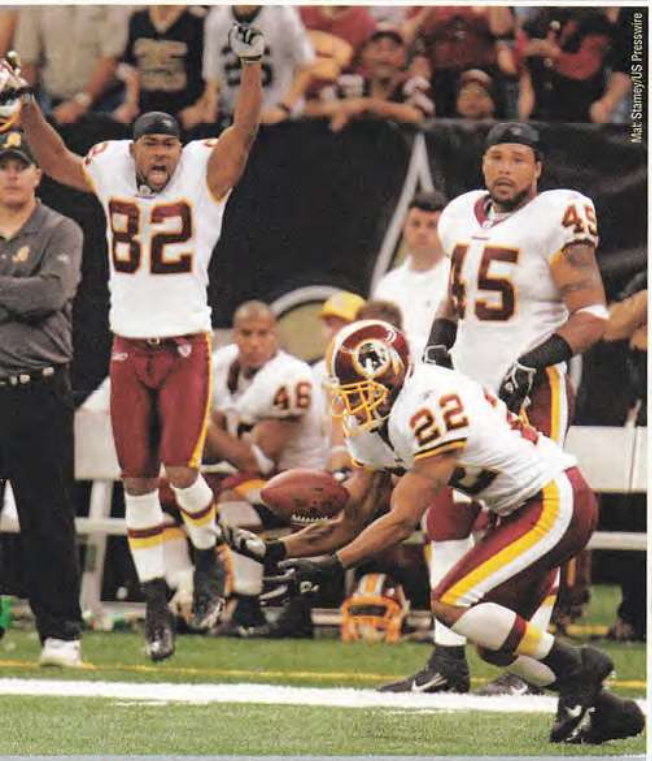
Brian Spurlock/US Presswire

▲ A JOB WELL DONE. Cato June (l) and Peyton Manning head to the dressing room after the Colts' division-clinching triumph.



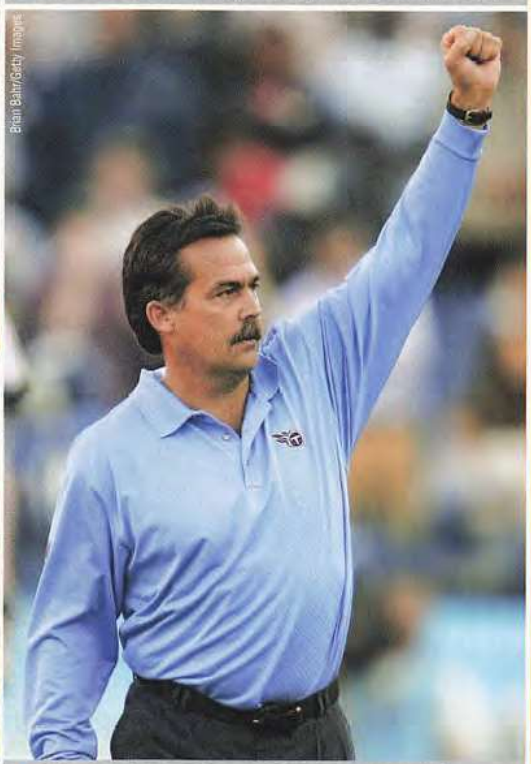
Bob Donnan/US Presswire

▲ WINNING NUMBER. Ben Roethlisberger threw for one TD and ran for another in leading Pittsburgh to its seventh victory.



Mat Slaney/US Presswire

▲ SKIN OF THEIR TEETH. Carlos Rogers makes a fourth-quarter interception to preserve Washington's win at New Orleans.



Brian Bahr/Getty Images

▲ FISHER'S LINE. Jeff Fisher celebrates Tennessee's triumph over Jacksonville, the team's seventh in its last nine games.

TURNING A LITTLE TIGHTER

With the Jets and Broncos collecting road victories, the AFC found itself with a wide-open battle for its two Wild Card slots. Chad Pennington completed 29 of 39 passes for 339 yards and threw a 21-yard TD to Laveranues Coles in New York's 26-13 win over the Vikings. "This is a fun time of year to play football," said Jets head coach Eric Mangini. Denver's Jay Cutler outdueled fellow rookie QB Matt Leinart while leading a 37-20 triumph over Arizona. Cutler delivered a 54-yard TD pass to Javon Walker on the Broncos' first possession, later fired a 10-yard scoring strike to Rod Smith, and finished the day 21-of-31 for 261 yards. The Jets, Broncos, Bengals, and Jaguars all stood at 8-6, while four other teams—among them the defending Super Bowl champion Steelers—hovered one game back. Pittsburgh won its third straight as Santonio Holmes had a 65-yard punt return for a touchdown and Willie Parker rushed for 132 yards in a 37-3 triumph over Carolina.

FLYING AROUND WEEK 15

Tennessee beat Jacksonville, 24-17, with all three of its TDs scored on returns. The final two broke open a 10-10 game: Cortland Finnegan sprinted 92 yards with a fumble recovery for one score; on the Jaguars' next possession, Chris Hope grabbed an interception and ran 61 yards into the end zone…Buffalo posted its first shutout since the 2003 opener, limiting the Dolphins to 212 total yards to take a 21-0 victory …The Rams forced five turnovers and Steven Jackson ran for two TDs in a 20-0 win over Oakland.

WEEK 15

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

THURSDAY, DEC. 14

San Francisco 24.....@ Seattle 14

SATURDAY, DEC. 16

Dallas 38.....@ Atlanta 28

SUNDAY, DEC. 17

@ Baltimore 27.....Cleveland 17
@ Buffalo 21.....Miami 0
@ Chicago 34.....Tampa Bay 31 (OT)
Denver 37.....@ Arizona 20
@ Green Bay 17.....Detroit 9
@ New England 40.....Houston 7
N.Y. Jets 26.....@ Minnesota 13
Philadelphia 36.....@ N.Y. Giants 22
Pittsburgh 37.....@ Carolina 3
St. Louis 20.....@ Oakland 0
@ Tennessee 24.....Jacksonville 17
Washington 16.....@ New Orleans 10
@ San Diego 20.....Kansas City 9

MONDAY, DEC. 18

@ Indianapolis 34.....Cincinnati 16

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

LaDainian Tomlinson (RB, Chargers): Rushed for 199 yards, with TD runs of 15 and 85 yards, and set three more NFL marks in win over Chiefs.

DEFENSE

Dwight Freeney (DE, Colts): Had four tackles, three sacks, and three forced fumbles to help defeat Cincinnati.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Brian Moorman (P, Bills): Pinned Miami inside its own 20 four times on his seven punts and allowed just 12 total return yards in Bills' shutout victory.

OFFENSE

Rex Grossman (QB, Bears): Set career highs for completions (29), attempts (44), and yards (339), and threw two TDs in leading win over Tampa Bay.

DEFENSE

Brian Dawkins (S, Eagles): Made game-high 12 tackles, forced two fumbles, and had an interception that led to a TD in win over Giants.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Matt Turk (P, Rams): Grossed 49.8 yards and netted 48.8 yards on five punts—highlighted by a 74-yard kick—in shutout win over Raiders.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Jay Cutler (QB, Broncos): Completed 21 of 31 passes for 261 yards and two touchdowns in victory at Arizona.

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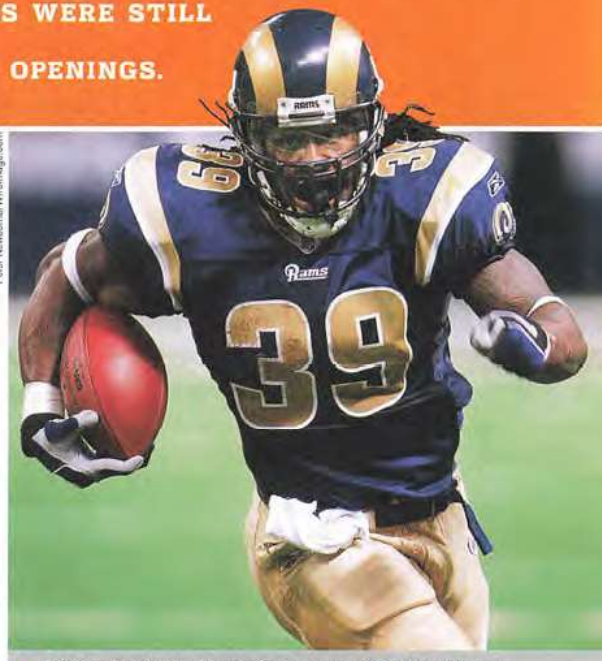
NFL NETWORK

WEEK 16 THINGS START TO TURN REALLY WILD

WITH MOST OF THE DIVISION RACES SETTLED, THE SUSPENSE BEGAN TO SHIFT TO THE WILD CARD HUNT. AT THE END OF THE WEEKEND, 11 TEAMS WERE STILL VYING FOR THE LEAGUE'S THREE REMAINING POSTSEASON OPENINGS.



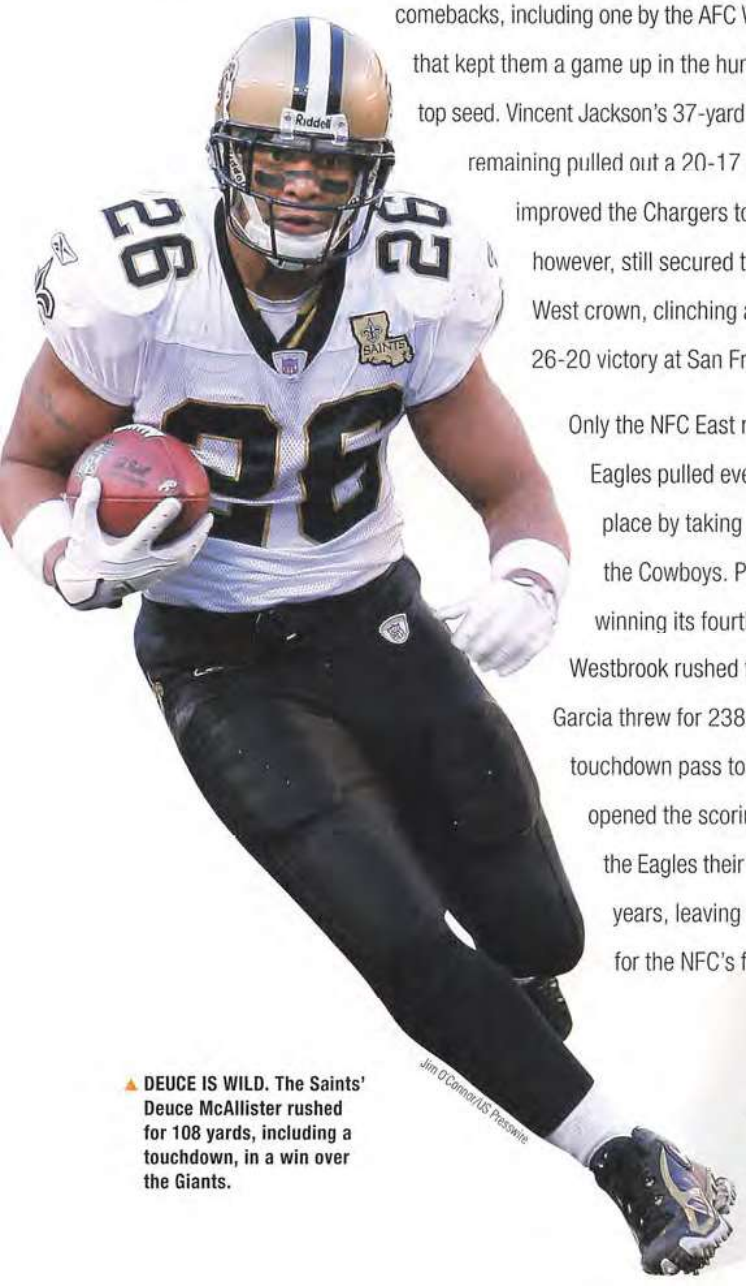
Peter Newcomb/WireImage.com

▲ **ACTION JACKSON. Steven Jackson ran for 150 yards and added 102 yards receiving in the Rams' overtime victory.**

New England locked up the AFC East by edging Jacksonville and had the look of a team poised for a run at a fourth Super Bowl title in six years. Tom Brady threw for one TD and Corey Dillon and Laurence Maroney each added scoring runs in the 24-21 win, the Patriots' fifth in their last six games. The defense gave up just 12 first downs and Rodney Harrison nailed down the triumph with a fumble recovery that ended the Jaguars' final threat. Despite losing, Jacksonville remained among six teams alive in the AFC playoff picture.

The week featured 10 games decided by a touchdown or less, as well as five fourth-quarter comebacks, including one by the AFC West-champion Chargers that kept them a game up in the hunt for the conference's top seed. Vincent Jackson's 37-yard TD grab with 29 seconds remaining pulled out a 20-17 win over Seattle that improved the Chargers to 13-2. The Seahawks, however, still secured their third straight NFC West crown, clinching as a result of Arizona's 26-20 victory at San Francisco.

Only the NFC East remained in doubt as the Eagles pulled even with Dallas for first place by taking a 23-7 triumph from the Cowboys. Philly led start to finish in winning its fourth straight game. Brian Westbrook rushed for 122 yards and Jeff Garcia threw for 238, including a 25-yard touchdown pass to Matt Schobel that opened the scoring. That win guaranteed the Eagles their sixth playoff trip in seven years, leaving five teams to fight it out for the NFC's final postseason slot.



Jim O'Connor/US Presswire

▲ **DEUCE IS WILD. The Saints' Deuce McAllister rushed for 108 yards, including a touchdown, in a win over the Giants.**

DESTINY IN THEIR HANDS

Denver slipped past Cincinnati—literally—in a showdown between AFC playoff hopefuls. Playing at a snow-splattered Invesco Field, the Broncos' Jay Cutler became the second player in league history to throw for multiple touchdowns in each of his first four games, but the outcome still rested on a missed extra point. Cutler fired TDs to Tony Scheffler and Javon Walker as Denver built a 24-17 lead. Late in the game, Carson Palmer directed the Bengals on a 12-play, 90-yard march that he finished off with a 10-yard TD throw to T.J. Houshmandzadeh, making it 24-23 with 46 seconds to play. But a bad snap on the PAT prevented the visitors from tying things up. "That only happens on PlayStation games," said Denver defensive end Kenard Lang. "I'm sitting here amazed." The Jets also strengthened their playoff position by edging Miami, 13-10, on Mike Nugent's 30-yard field goal with 10 seconds remaining. Chad Pennington's 64-yard pass to Leon Washington set up the winning kick. The Broncos and Jets both stood at 9-6, one game ahead of the Titans, Jaguars, Bengals, and Chiefs in the AFC Wild Card race.

"WE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A CAKEWALK."

~Eagles head coach Andy Reid, joking about his team's three straight road victories over NFC East rivals.

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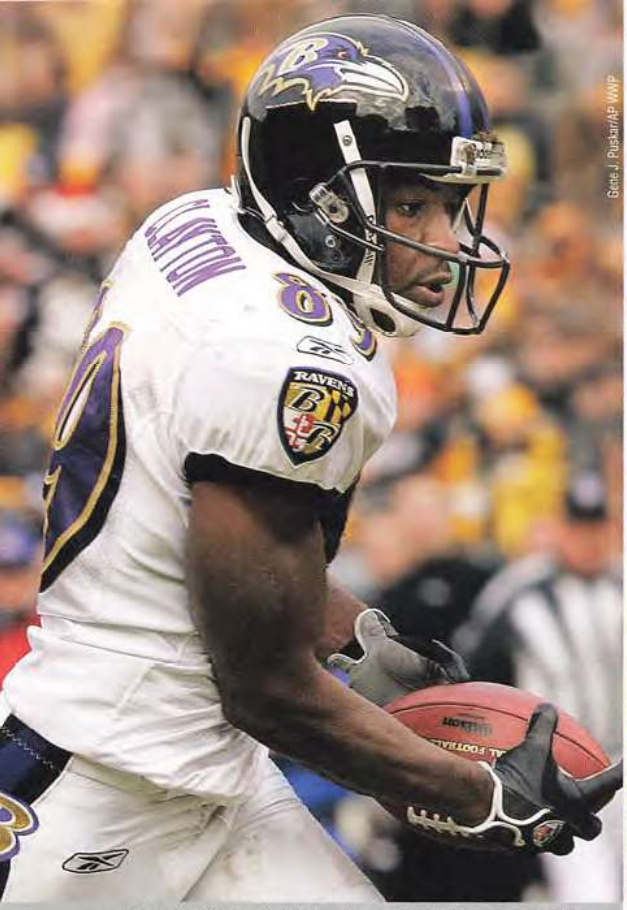
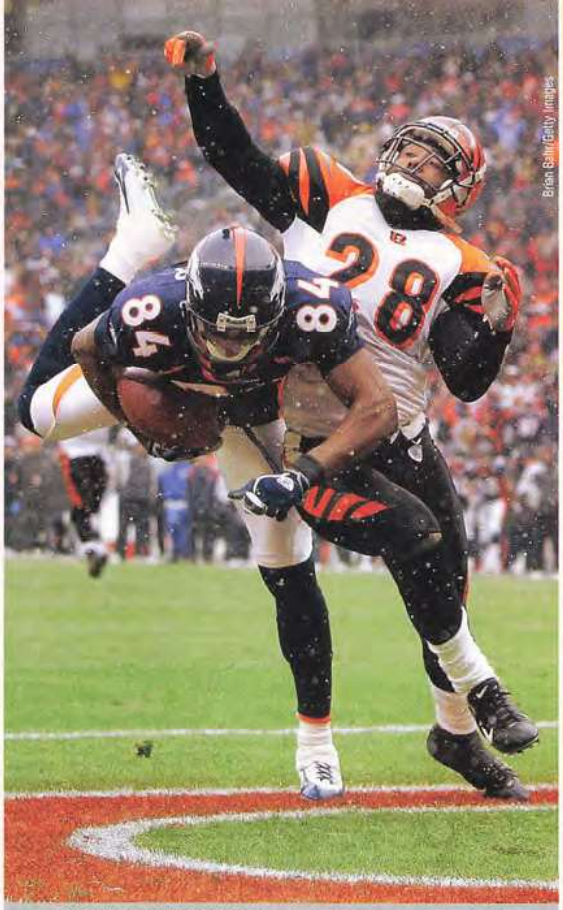


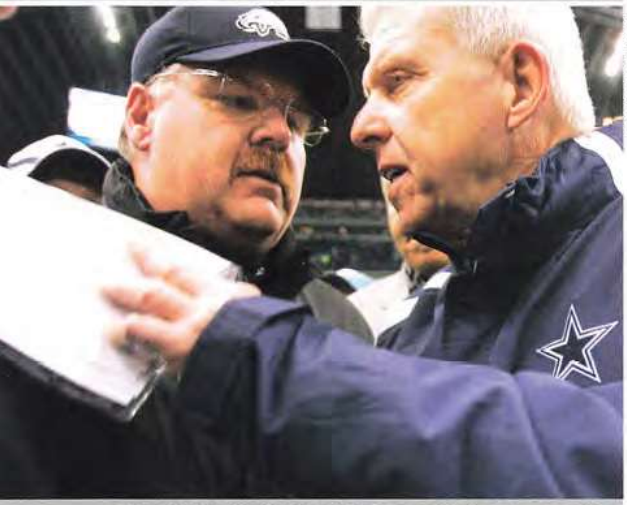
Gene J. Puskar/AP WWP

▲ MARK IT UP. Mark Clayton takes off with his 35-yard TD catch for the first points in the Ravens' win at Pittsburgh.



Brian Bahr/Getty Images

▲ A WALK-ER IN THE SNOW. Javon Walker comes down with a 39-yard TD catch during Denver's victory over the Bengals.



Tony Gutierrez/AP WWP

▲ COACH SPEAK. Philadelphia's Andy Reid (l) meets up with the Cowboys' Bill Parcells after the Eagles' 23-7 victory.

SOUTHERN SURGE

A pair of AFC South teams produced eye-catching victories. The Titans rallied with 10 fourth-quarter points to nip Buffalo, 30-29, as they aimed to become the first team to reach the playoffs after an 0-5 start. The game featured seven lead changes, the final one coming when Vince Young drove Tennessee 75 yards to set up Rob Bironas' 39-yard field goal with 2:10 remaining. Minutes earlier, Young tossed a 29-yard touchdown to Brandon Jones that pulled the Titans within two. "Every week [Vince] does something to amaze me," said Jones. Young completed 13 of 20 passes for 183 yards, including a 22-yard scoring toss to Bobby Wade for the Titans' first points, and also ran for a 39-yard touchdown. In Houston, Ron Dayne rushed for 153 yards and scored twice as the Texans defeated Indianapolis for the first time in franchise history. The playoff-bound Colts had knotted the game on Peyton Manning's 7-yard touchdown pass to Marvin Harrison with 2:41 remaining, but David Carr drove Houston 31 yards and into range for Kris Brown, who nailed a 48-yard field goal at the final gun for the 27-24 victory.

WEEK SIXTEEN SUPERLATIVES

Reggie Bush ran for 126 yards and Deuce McAllister added 108 in New Orleans' 30-7 win over the Giants …Brett Favre produced the 36th comeback victory of his career, driving Green Bay down the field for Dave Rayner's 44-yard field goal with 1:34 to play that beat the Vikings, 9-7…Michael Vick became the first NFL quarterback to rush for 1,000 yards in a season in the Falcons' 10-3 loss to Carolina. The Panthers limited Atlanta, which entered the game averaging 193 rushing yards per game, to just 83 yards on the ground…Steve McNair threw three TD passes and the Ravens tied a franchise-record for wins (12) as they defeated Pittsburgh, 31-7. The loss knocked the defending Super Bowl champion Steelers from playoff contention…Larry Johnson rushed for 137 yards and the Chiefs' defense came up with five turnovers in a 20-9 victory at Oakland.

WEEK 16

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

THURSDAY, DEC. 21

@ Green Bay 9 ..... Minnesota 7

SATURDAY, DEC. 23

Kansas City 20 ..... @ Oakland 9

SUNDAY, DEC. 24

Arizona 26 ..... @ San Francisco 20
Baltimore 31 ..... @ Pittsburgh 7
Carolina 10 ..... @ Atlanta 3
Chicago 26 ..... @ Detroit 21
@ Denver 24 ..... Cincinnati 23
@ Houston 27 ..... Indianapolis 24
New England 24 ... @ Jacksonville 21
New Orleans 30 ..... @ N.Y. Giants 7
@ St. Louis 37 ... Washington 31 (OT)
San Diego 20 ..... @ Seattle 17
Tampa Bay 22 ..... @ Cleveland 7
Tennessee 30 ..... @ Buffalo 29

MONDAY, DEC. 25

Philadelphia 23 ..... @ Dallas 7
N.Y. Jets 13 ..... @ Miami 10

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Vince Young (QB, Titans): Engineered fourth fourth-quarter/OT comeback of season, as he posted a 127.7 passer rating by throwing for 183 yards and two touchdowns in win at Buffalo.

DEFENSE

Shawne Merriman (LB, Chargers): Had three sacks, two QB pressures, and two passes defensed vs. Seattle.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kris Brown (K, Texans): Hit a pair of fourth-quarter FGs (42 and 48 yards) that lifted team to victory over Colts.

OFFENSE

Steven Jackson (RB, Rams): Totalled 252 yards from scrimmage—150 rushing/102 receiving—and scored game-winning TD to beat Washington.

DEFENSE

Aaron Kampman (DE, Packers): Seven tackles and three sacks, along with four QB hurries, as Packers allowed just 104 yards in victory over Vikings.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Robbie Gould (K, Bears): Kicked four field goals—from 36, 36, 39, and 44 yards—three of those in fourth quarter as Chicago rallied to beat Detroit.

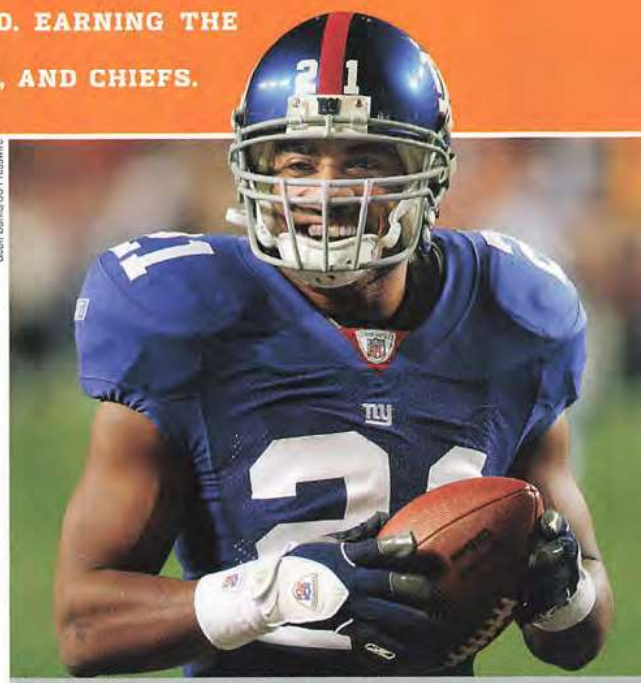
DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Vince Young (QB, Titans): Threw for two touchdowns and ran for another in Titans' comeback win at Buffalo.

WEEK 17

THE PLAYOFFS ARE THE FINAL PAYOFF

A FEW TWISTS AND TURNS—AND A FINAL DOSE OF OVERTIME DRAMA—REMAINED BEFORE THE NFL'S LAST THREE WILD CARD SLOTS WERE AWARDED. EARNING THE RIGHT TO PLAY ON INTO JANUARY WERE THE GIANTS, JETS, AND CHIEFS.



Geoff Burke/US Presswire

GOING OUT IN STYLE. Playing in his final regular-season game, Tiki Barber rushed for a Giants-record 234 yards.

Behind Tiki Barber's franchise-record 234 rushing yards, the Giants outgunned Washington, 34-28, to secure their second straight NFC postseason bid. Barber—playing in his final regular-season game after announcing he'd retire at the conclusion of the 2006 campaign—scored on runs of 15, 55, and 50 yards, the last of which regained momentum for the Giants, who had seen their 27-7 third-quarter lead trimmed to just six points.

The Jets punched their AFC playoff ticket by overcoming Oakland, 23-3. Their points came on Chad Pennington's 1-yard TD throw to Chris Baker, Leon Washington's 15-yard scoring run, and Mike Nugent's three field goals, while the defense yielded just 209 total yards and recovered a pair of fumbles.

John Rieger/US Presswire

HAIL TO THE CHIEFS. Larry Johnson ran for 138 yards and three TDs as Kansas City captured an AFC Wild Card playoff berth.

Kansas City needed a win and some help to keep its season going—and got both. With Larry Johnson scoring three times and setting an NFL record for rushing attempts in a season (416), the Chiefs did their part by defeating the Jaguars, 35-30. Losses by the Titans, Bengals, and Broncos put them over the top. Denver could have gained the nod, but fell, 26-23, to the 49ers on Joe Nedney's 36-yard field goal in OT.

In the final division race to be decided, the Eagles found themselves atop the NFC East perch for the fifth time in six years. Dallas' 39-31 home loss to Detroit made it official, though Philadelphia still went out and beat Atlanta, 24-17.

TAKE YOUR POSITIONS

Although all four AFC divisions had been decided, Week 17 still involved jockeying for playoff seeding and first-round byes. San Diego wrapped up the top seed as Philip Rivers threw a pair of TD passes and LaDainian Tomlinson earned his first NFL rushing title (1,815 yards) in a 27-20 win over the Cardinals. The Chargers' 14-2 record ranked as the best in franchise history. Baltimore put itself in the No. 2 spot and also earned a week off by beating Buffalo, 19-7. After the Bills pulled within 9-7 in the third quarter, the Ravens' Chris McAlister picked off a J.P. Losman pass and raced 31 yards for a momentum-swinging score. During the game, Baltimore's Steve McNair joined Steve Young and Fran Tarkenton as the only players in NFL history to reach 30,000 yards passing and 3,500 yards rushing. Indianapolis

WEEK 17 STANDINGS

*Division champion; **Wild Card qualifier

AFC East	W-L-T	PF	PA
New England*	12-4-0	385	237
N.Y. Jets**	10-6-0	316	295
Buffalo	7-9-0	300	311
Miami	6-10-0	260	283

AFC North	W-L-T	PF	PA
Baltimore*	13-3-0	353	201
Cincinnati	8-8-0	373	331
Pittsburgh	8-8-0	353	315
Cleveland	4-12-0	238	356

AFC South	W-L-T	PF	PA
Indianapolis*	12-4-0	427	360
Jacksonville	8-8-0	371	274
Tennessee	8-8-0	324	400
Houston	6-10-0	267	366

AFC West	W-L-T	PF	PA
San Diego*	14-2-0	492	303
Kansas City**	9-7-0	331	315
Denver	9-7-0	319	305
Oakland	2-14-0	168	332

NFC East	W-L-T	PF	PA
Philadelphia*	10-6-0	398	328
Dallas**	9-7-0	425	350
N.Y. Giants**	8-8-0	355	362
Washington	5-11-0	307	376

NFC North	W-L-T	PF	PA
Chicago*	13-3-0	427	255
Green Bay	8-8-0	301	366
Minnesota	6-10-0	282	327
Detroit	3-13-0	305	398

NFC South	W-L-T	PF	PA
New Orleans*	10-6-0	413	322
Carolina	8-8-0	270	305
Atlanta	7-9-0	292	328
Tampa Bay	4-12-0	211	353

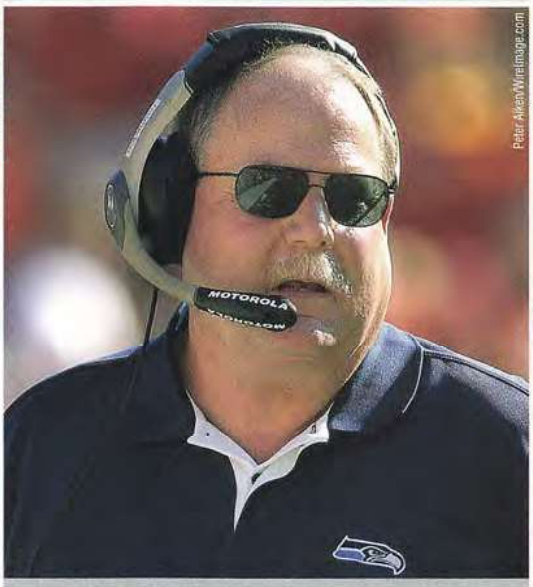
NFC West	W-L-T	PF	PA
Seattle*	9-7-0	335	341
St. Louis	8-8-0	367	381
San Francisco	7-9-0	298	412
Arizona	5-11-0	314	389

Jim O'Connor/Getty Images

▲ FUELING THE JETS. Jonathan Vilma's five tackles came as part of a win over Oakland that put the Jets in the postseason.

Andy Lyons/Getty Images

▲ VENERABLE VINNY. Vinny Testaverde extended his league record by throwing a TD pass for the 20th straight year.



Peter Aiken/Wireimage.com

▲ SEATTLE'S BEST. Head coach Mike Holmgren guided the Seahawks to their third straight NFC West championship.

gained the conference's third seed by beating Miami, 27-22, behind Peyton Manning's two TD passes and 11-yard scoring run. That made the Patriots' triumph at Tennessee moot. Corey Dillon ran for a pair of touchdowns in the 40-23 win, but New England still had to settle for the No. 4 position.

FITTING FINALES

Two NFL greats contemplating retirement finished the year in uplifting fashion. Packers QB Brett Favre, starting his 237th consecutive game, threw for 285 yards—which included a 9-yard TD to Donald Driver—as part of a 26-7 victory at Chicago. "If this is my last game, I want to remember it," said Favre. "What a great way to go out against a great football team." Five days after his team knocked off division rival Cincinnati, 23-17, and eliminated the Bengals from playoff contention, Steelers head coach Bill Cowher stepped down. The 49-year-old Cowher spent 15 years in Pittsburgh, where he posted a 161-99-1 (.619) overall record. His teams won eight division titles, a pair of AFC Championships, and Super Bowl XL. "History will look back on Bill Cowher as one of the great head coaches of his time," said Steelers Chairman Dan Rooney. "He led us through one of the most successful eras in franchise history and has my lasting respect and admiration."

CLOSING COMMENTS

Jon Kitna threw for 306 yards and four touchdowns in Detroit's 39-31 victory at Dallas…Seattle gained momentum in preparation for defending its NFC title by beating Tampa Bay, 23-7. Shaun Alexander rushed for 92 yards and scored on a 1-yard run, and Matt Hasselbeck threw a 5-yard pass to D.J. Hackett for the Seahawks' other touchdown…Steven Jackson scored four touchdowns while amassing 166 yards from scrimmage in the Rams' 41-21 victory over the Vikings. His 55-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter prevented Minnesota's defense from setting an NFL record for fewest rushing yards allowed in a season. The Vikings' total of 985 ended up being 15 more than Baltimore allowed in 2000.

WEEK 17

ONE GAME. ONE DREAM.

SCORES

SATURDAY, DEC. 30

N.Y. Giants 34 .....@ Washington 28

SUNDAY, DEC. 31

@ Baltimore 19 .....Buffalo 7
Carolina 31 .....@ New Orleans 21
Detroit 39 .....@ Dallas 31
@ Indianapolis 27 .....Miami 22
@ Kansas City 35.....Jacksonville 30
New England 40 .....@ Tennessee 23
@ N.Y. Jets 23 .....Oakland 3
@ Philadelphia 24.....Atlanta 17
Pittsburgh 23 ....@ Cincinnati 17 (OT)
St. Louis 41 .....@ Minnesota 21
@ San Diego 27 .....Arizona 20
San Francisco 26...@ Denver 23 (OT)
Seattle 23 .....@ Tampa Bay 7
Green Bay 26 .....@ Chicago 7

PLAYER AWARDS

OFFENSE

Peyton Manning (QB, Colts): Threw for 282 yards with two touchdowns and no interceptions—producing a 101.4 passer rating—and also ran for a score in victory over Miami.

DEFENSE

Chris McAlister (CB, Ravens): Grabbed career-high sixth interception, which he returned 31 yards for a TD, and also defensed three passes and had three tackles in win over Buffalo.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Bernard Pollard (S, Chiefs): Blocked a punt and recovered it for a TD and added two tackles in win vs. Jaguars.

OFFENSE

Tiki Barber (RB, Giants): Recorded fifth 200-yard rushing game of career, amassing 234 yards while scoring three times in win at Washington.

DEFENSE

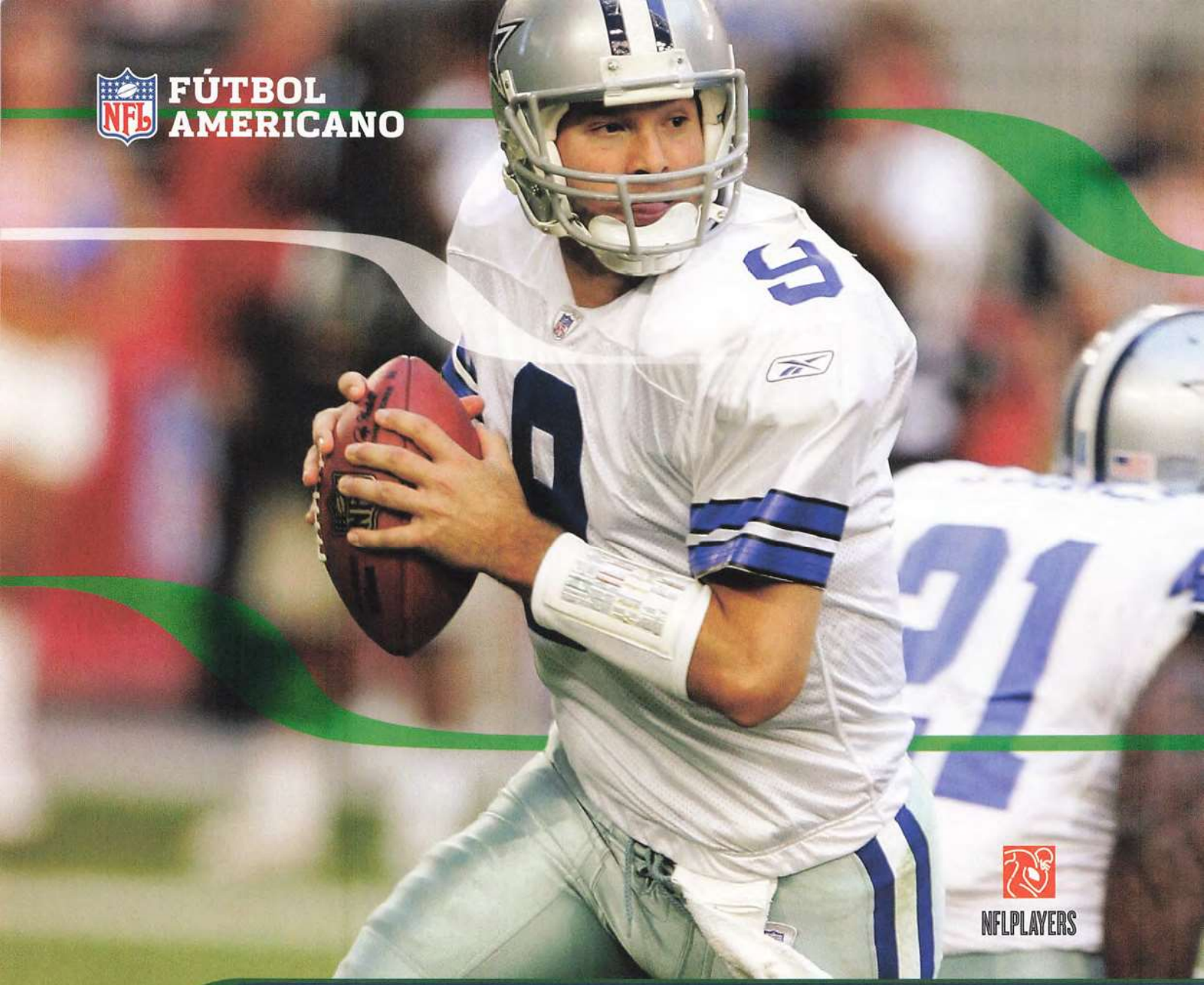
Walt Harris (CB, 49ers): Had a pair of interceptions, one he returned 28 yards for a TD, and added a fumble recovery, four passes defensed, and four tackles in OT triumph at Denver.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Jason Hanson (K, Lions): Kicked four field goals, his 20th career game with at least four FGs, and scored 15 of team's 39 points in win at Dallas.

DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE

Hank Baskett (WR, Eagles): Caught seven passes for 177 yards, including an 89-yard TD, in victory vs. Atlanta.



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AFC WILD CARD PLAYOFFS

@ INDIANAPOLIS 23, KANSAS CITY 8

The Colts stopped the run, stopped the pass, and stopped the visiting Chiefs in their tracks, scoring a 23-8 triumph that pushed the AFC South champions deeper into the postseason.

Knowing its defense would be tested by Kansas City's Larry Johnson—the battering-ram back who this year set an NFL record for carries in a season—Indianapolis was more than ready for the challenge. Johnson managed just 32 yards on 13 attempts and the Chiefs didn't muster a first down until 3:34 remained in the third quarter.

By then, the Colts had built a 16-0 lead. Though Kansas City would break through to make it a one-possession game, Peyton Manning answered right away with a back-breaking 71-yard touchdown march to secure the win and set up a Divisional Playoff clash against the Ravens.

Manning finished the day completing 30 of 38 passes for 268 yards with one TD, but he gave all the credit for the win to the team's defense.

"Our defense was awesome," he said. "We made some mistakes [on offense] and the defense made sure we didn't pay for it."

During the season, Indy surrendered 173 yards rushing per game, but allowed only 126 total yards to the Chiefs. The Colts' defense collected four sacks, two by Dwight Freeney, and added a pair of interceptions.

"We heard all about [us] having the worst defense," said Freeney. "Now we can hear this: We have the best run defense in the playoffs."

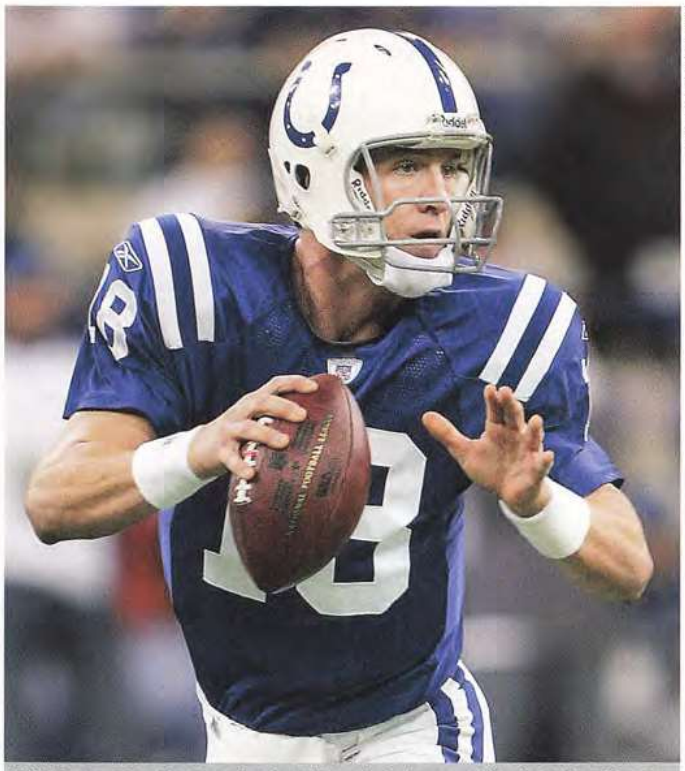
All of the Colts' first-half points came off the foot of Adam Vinatieri, who hit field goals from 48 and 19 yards in the first quarter, then connected from 50 yards out on the final play of the half. Rookie Joseph Addai, who rushed for 122 yards, then made it 16-0 with a 6-yard touchdown run in the third quarter.

Kansas City got its initial first down of the game during a 60-yard drive that Trent Green capped with a 6-yard TD to Tony Gonzalez. A two-point conversion made the deficit 16-8.

Indy stormed right back with a touchdown march of its own, capped by Manning's 5-yard toss to Reggie Wayne. A Bob Sanders interception then iced any hopes the Chiefs had for a fourth-quarter comeback.

Colts tight end Dallas Clark caught nine passes for 103 yards, while Addai added seven receptions out of the backfield.

Ty Law had two interceptions for Kansas City, including a second-quarter pickoff he returned to the Colts' 9-yard line.



Jonathan Daniel/Getty Images

With Peyton Manning throwing for 268 yards, Indy passed its first playoff test.

Brian Spurlock/US Presswire

Reggie Wayne's fourth-quarter touchdown reception came after the Chiefs had pulled within eight points.

Enjoy the game.

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AFC WILD CARD PLAYOFFS

@ New England 37, N.Y. Jets 16

A clash of division rivals went the Patriots' way, thanks to the steady arm of Tom Brady, several clock-eating scoring drives, and a defense that came up big every time it was called upon.

David Butler II/US Presswire

The play of Asante Samuel (left) and Tom Brady gave the Patriots a big lift.

Brady threw touchdown passes to Daniel Graham and Kevin Faulk as part of his 22-of-34, 212-yard afternoon. His first scoring throw put New England ahead to stay just before halftime.

"We had a great game plan," said Brady, whose squad lost to New York, 17-14, when the teams met in Foxborough in November. "[The Jets have] a pressure defense, and I think we were prepared much more for the pressure this time around."

The AFC East champions won for the seventh time in eight games since that defeat and advanced to face the top-seeded Chargers in the second round of the playoffs. The victory also improved New England to 9-1 all-time in home playoff games, the last loss coming 28 years ago.

After the Patriots scored on their first possession—Corey Dillon's 11-yard run capped a nifty 10-play drive—the Jets showed they were going to make a game of it. Hank Poteat's fumble recovery set up Mike Nugent's 28-yard field goal and New York took the lead on Jerricho Cotchery's 77-yard catch-and-run TD early in the second quarter.

New England knotted the game, 10-10, on Stephen Gostkowski's 20-yard field goal and regained the lead when Brady fired a TD to Graham, finishing a drive that chewed nearly seven minutes off the clock.

"I just put it up there and tried to let that big guy make a play for us," Brady said.

Another big play came in the third quarter, when the Patriots' Rosevelt Colvin batted down a Chad Pennington (23-of-40, 300 yards) pass. An alert Vince Wilfork picked up the loose ball—which was ruled a fumble—and ran 31 yards before being tackled at the Jets' 15.

"I think it was something that broke the game open for us," said New England's Richard Seymour, who had four tackles and a sack.

The play led to another Gostkowski field goal that made it 23-13. Nugent countered with a 37-yard FG to get the Jets back within seven, but another long drive, this one capped with Faulk racing 7 yards into the end zone after catching a Brady pass, extended the margin.

Asante Samuel then put an exclamation point on the victory, picking off Pennington and running 36 yards for the game's final touchdown with 4:54 left to play.

David Butler II/US Presswire

Tedy Bruschi was part of an effort that allowed New England to wrap up its ninth straight home playoff win.

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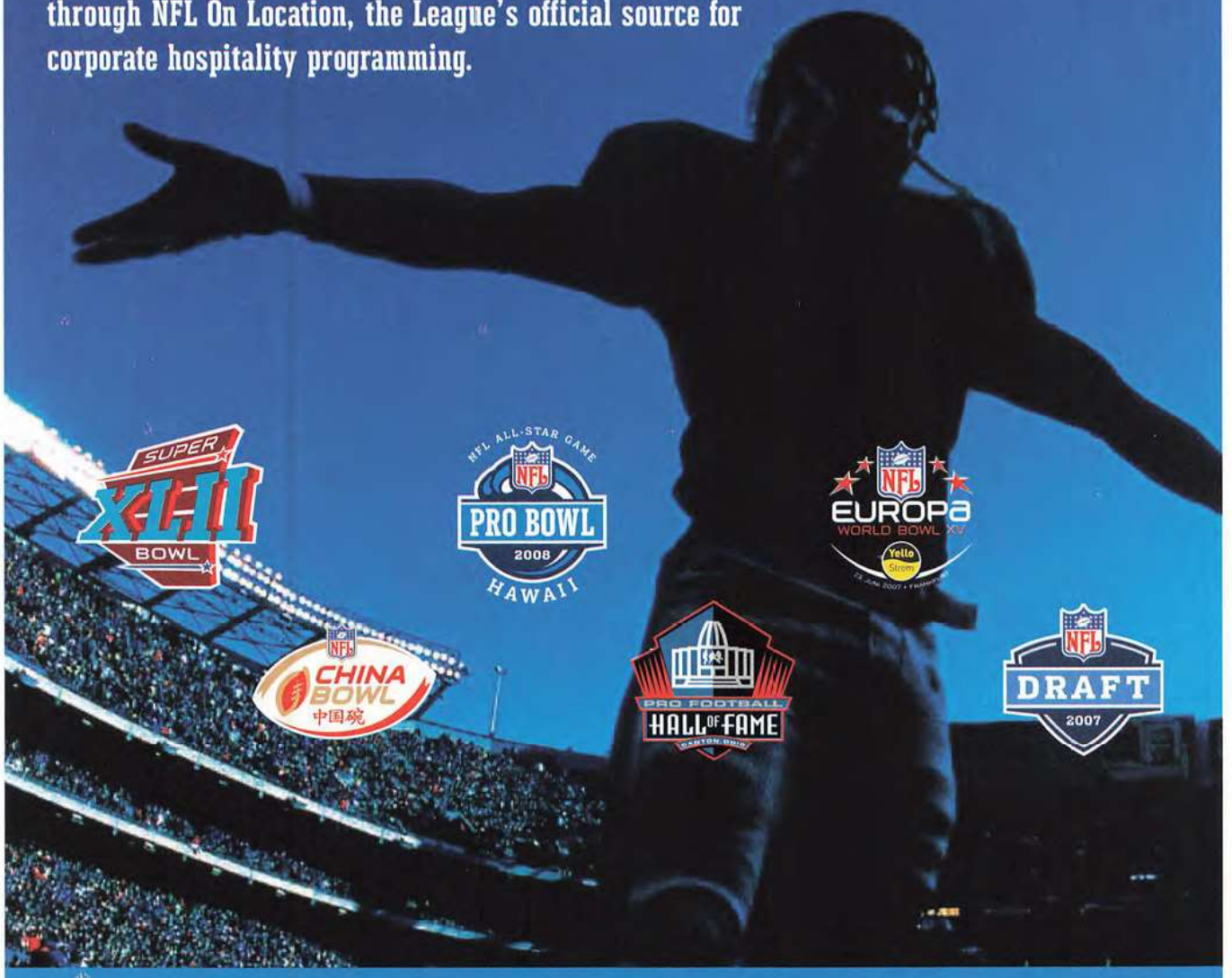
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NFC WILD CARD PLAYOFFS

@ SEATTLE 21, DALLAS 20

As playoff encounters go, it can't get much wilder than the fireworks Seattle and Dallas delivered, with a series of big plays and misplays down the stretch sending the Seahawks to victory.

Much of the postgame focus was directed at a mishandled snap that prevented Dallas kicker Martin Gramatica from attempting a potential game-winning 19-yard field goal with 1:19 to play.

"You coach long enough, you end up seeing just about everything," said Seattle head coach Mike Holmgren, whose squad next turned its attention to the conference's top seed, Chicago, as it pursued a second straight NFC championship. "One more thing for the journal."

The game marked Holmgren's 12th career playoff victory, tying him with Bill Cowher for sixth-most in NFL history.

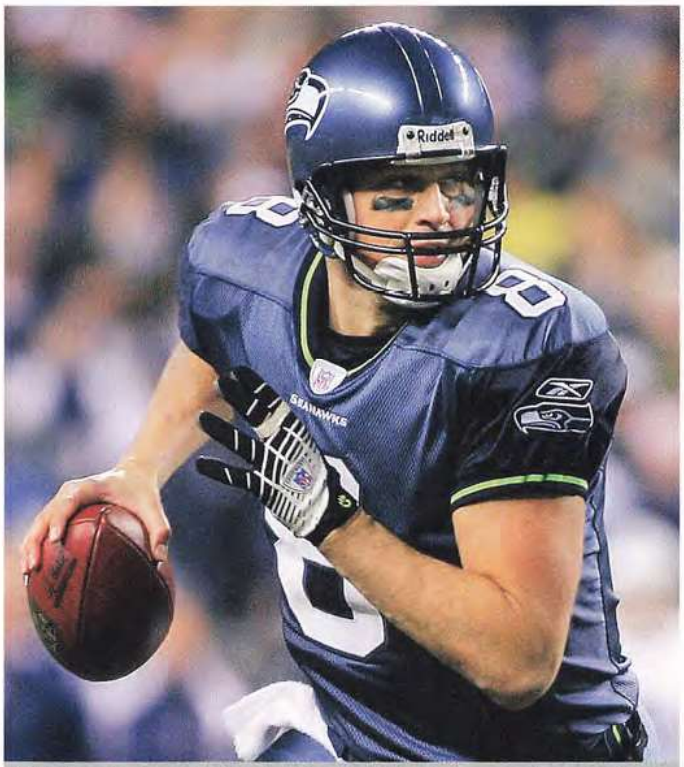
Dallas owned a 20-13 lead and appeared to have things going its way after a goal-line stand midway through the fourth quarter. But on the very next play, Seattle cornerback Kelly Jennings poked the ball away from receiver Terry Glenn and it bounced out of the end zone for a safety. The Seahawks then took possession on a free kick and needed just four snaps to tally the go-ahead score as QB Matt Hasselbeck found Jerramy Stevens open for a 37-yard touchdown with 4:24 to play. Despite missing on the two-point conversion, Seattle still led, 21-20.

Cowboys QB Tony Romo countered by marching his team 70 yards to set up Gramatica, who earlier had made field goals from 50 and 29 yards. Romo—serving as the holder for the kick—took the snap, but fumbled the ball as he placed it on the turf. He picked up the loose ball and tried to run for a score, but was dragged down by Jordan Babineaux at the 2-yard line.

Seattle RB Shaun Alexander followed by delivering a big 20-yard gain that gave the Seahawks' offense breathing room and helped run down the clock. The Cowboys got the ball back with only enough time for a desperation pass to the end zone, which fell incomplete.

Hasselbeck completed 18 of 36 passes for 240 yards, while Romo finished 17-for-29 for 189 yards and a TD. Romo's 13-yard toss to Patrick Crayton had put the Cowboys ahead, 10-6, just before halftime.

After Seattle scored on a Hasselbeck-to-Stevens touchdown in the third quarter, Miles Austin recorded the first kickoff return for a touchdown in Cowboys playoff history, going 93 yards as Dallas moved in front, 17-13.



Scott Cohen/US Presswire

Matt Hasselbeck and Seattle stayed in the running for a return Super Bowl trip.

Scott Cohen/US Presswire

Shaun Alexander's 20-yard gain after Dallas' mishandled field goal attempt helped preserve the victory.

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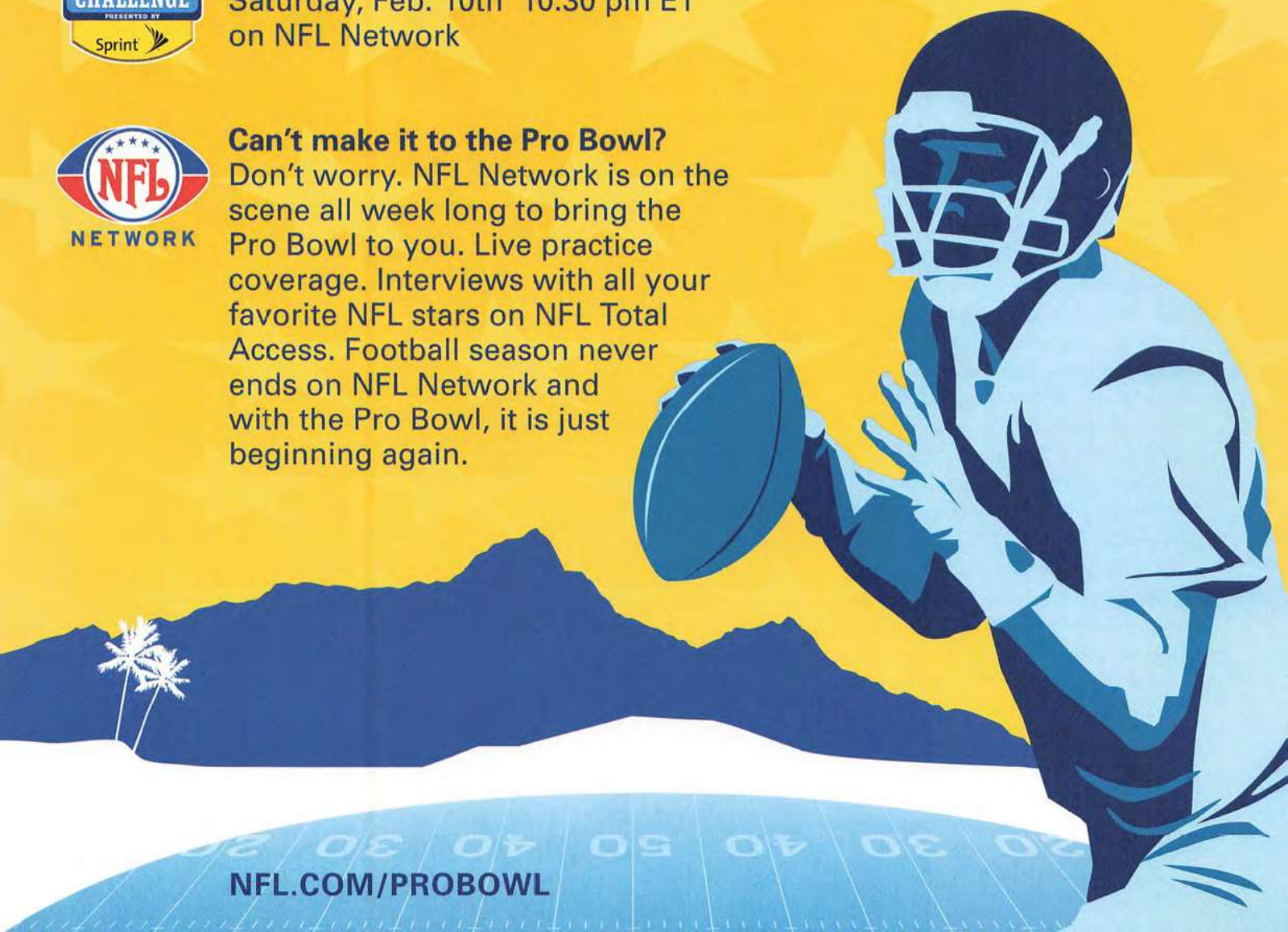

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NFC WILD CARD PLAYOFFS

@ PHILADELPHIA 23, N.Y. GIANTS 20

The Eagles' improbable late-season surge carried into the playoffs, as David Akers' 38-yard field goal as time expired defeated the Giants and gave Philadelphia its sixth straight win.

The clutch kick came only after the Giants had rallied from a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit to tie the game. Even after seeing the Cowboys' kicking misfortunes one night earlier in their Wild Card setback against the Seahawks, the left-footed Akers was supremely confident as he lined up his field goal.

"[Holder] Koy [Detmer] told me, 'Those posts look big, don't they?'" Akers said. "I answered him, 'Don't worry. We're going to be celebrating in a minute.'"

Still, Detmer didn't take his role for granted. "Being a holder for the amount of time I've been, you realize there's nothing given," said the 10-year veteran, who signed with the team less than a week before the game. "None of them are guaranteed. You have to make it happen."

Akers was the last in a series of Eagles heroes on the afternoon. Earlier, Brian Westbrook had put Philly on the board with a spectacular 49-yard TD dash down the right sideline, part of his 141-yard rushing effort. Quarterback Jeff Garcia completed 17 of 31 passes for 153 yards, including a 27-yard touchdown throw to Donté Stallworth that gave Philly a 17-10 lead. Garcia improved to 6-1 as a starter since replacing an injured Donovan McNabb and advanced the Eagles to a second-round playoff contest at New Orleans.

For the Giants, Eli Manning (16 of 27, 161 yards) threw two touchdown passes to Plaxico Burress, including an 11-yard strike that tied things up with 5:04 to go. Running back Tiki Barber, playing in the final game of his 10-year career, rushed for 137 yards.

New York scored the first time it touched the ball, with Manning directing a 67-yard march that he finished off with a 17-yard throw to Burress in the back of the end zone.

Shortly after Westbrook's touchdown, Sheldon Brown grabbed an interception that led to a 19-yard Akers field goal that moved the Eagles ahead. Akers later hit a 48-yarder—the longest FG in team playoff history—to make it 20-10, but the Giants countered with Jay Feely's 24-yard field goal and knotted the game when Manning fired a second TD to Burress.

Reggie Brown made a game-high seven catches for Philadelphia.

Doug Benc/Getty Images

By beating the Giants, David Akers and the Eagles watched their season continue.

Howard Smith/US Presswire

Brian Westbrook was often just beyond the Giants' reach, rushing for 141 yards, including a 49-yard TD.

John Goodman for the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

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AFC DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

INDIANAPOLIS 15, @ BALTIMORE 6

For years, success for the Colts has depended on Peyton Manning's arm. This game featured a different player and a different appendage. This win came via Adam Vinatieri's leg.

Chris Gardner/AP WWP

Adam Vinatieri had a jump in his step after kicking five field goals for the Colts.

Vinatieri, signed by Indianapolis in the offseason after performing myriad postseason heroics for the rival Patriots, did not disappoint his new employers. He booted five field goals, accounting for all of the Colts' points in a 15-6 victory over the AFC North champion Ravens.

"Adam has been exceptional all year," said Indianapolis head coach Tony Dungy. "You just feel like he's going to make it every time. In games like this, it's necessary."

The last time the Colts played a playoff game in Baltimore—in 1977 against the Raiders—they were the home team. The town now belongs to the Ravens, whose defense led the league in fewest points allowed, fewest yards allowed, and most interceptions. Even with two supremely talented quarterbacks at the helm in Manning and Baltimore's Steve McNair, this didn't figure to be a high-scoring affair.

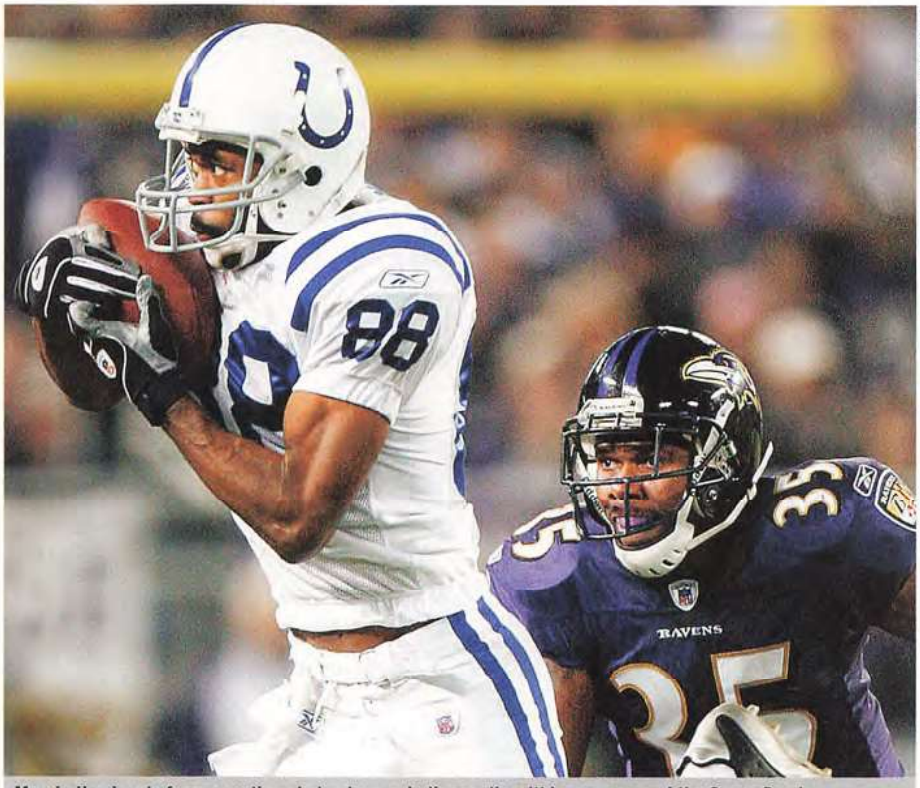
What was surprising was the way in which Indianapolis' defense stepped up for the second straight week. This time it stymied McNair and the Ravens' offense, allowing just 83 yards rushing and 161 yards through the air while picking off two passes, recovering two fumbles, and recording two sacks.

"You want touchdowns and it's frustrating to have to settle for field goals," said Manning. "But we saw how our defense was playing early, and we thought field goals would be enough—if we got enough of them."

Enter Vinatieri, who connected on tries of 23, 42, 51, 48, and 35 yards. His 48-yarder at the 4:03 mark of the third quarter gave him the all-time record for playoff field goals (33), breaking the mark held by Gary Anderson.

After Baltimore went three-and-out on its first possession, Manning (15-of-30, 170 yards) directed an 11-play, 49-yard drive that ended with Vinatieri's first field goal. The Colts would not trail the rest of the day.

Down 6-3 in the second, Ed Reed picked off Manning and the Ravens drove to the Colts' 5-yard line, only to have Antoine Bethea intercept a McNair pass at the goal line. The Ravens wouldn't get that close a look at the end zone again, while the Colts moved one step—and maybe a few kicks—closer to the Super Bowl.



Justin Kase Conder/US Presswire

Marvin Harrison's four receptions helped move Indianapolis within one game of the Super Bowl.

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AFC DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

NEW ENGLAND 24, @ SAN DIEGO 21

The Chargers had home-field, the AFC's top seed, and the league's MVP. The Patriots had Tom Brady. And even on a day when Brady wasn't brilliant, he was still great when it counted.

Brady, a three-time Super Bowl winner, showed why rings are his thing. He directed two late fourth-quarter scoring drives, the second one capped by Stephen Gostkowski's tie-breaking 31-yard field goal that lifted the Patriots to a dramatic 24-21 triumph.

After New England went ahead early on a 50-yard Gostkowski field goal, the Chargers scored the game's first two touchdowns—a 1-yard run by league MVP LaDainian Tomlinson at 7:41 of the second quarter, followed by Michael Turner's 6-yard dart five minutes later. The Patriots closed the gap to a manageable 14-10 just before halftime when Brady capped an 11-play, 72-yard drive with a 6-yard throw to Jabar Gaffney.

Gostkowski's 34-yard field goal was the only scoring of the third quarter, but Tomlinson extended San Diego's lead to 21-13 with his 3-yard run that finished off a nine-play, 83-yard drive. For the game, Tomlinson totalled 123 rushing yards on 23 carries and caught two of Philip Rivers' passes for another 64 yards.

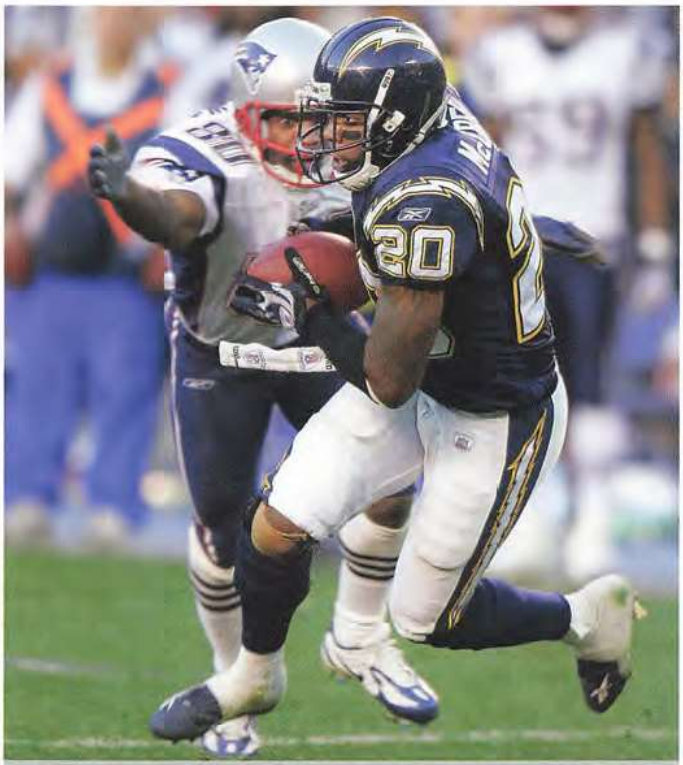
Still, when it comes to fourth-quarter heroics, the book has been written by Brady, and this would be another scintillating chapter. After the Tomlinson touchdown, the Patriots' next drive was seemingly stopped when Brady was intercepted on fourth down by safety Marlon McCree. But while trying to return the pick, McCree was stripped by New England receiver Troy Brown and fumbled. The Patriots' Reche Caldwell fell on the ball, giving his quarterback a new set of downs to work his magic.

Five plays later, Brady connected with Caldwell, a former Charger, for a 4-yard TD in the corner of the end zone. A tricky two-point conversion—where running back Kevin Faulk took the direct snap and ran up the middle for the score—tied the game at 21-21.

San Diego subsequently failed to move the ball, but Brady didn't. On the Patriots' next possession, he led an 8-play, 72-yard march that put Gostkowski in range for the winner.

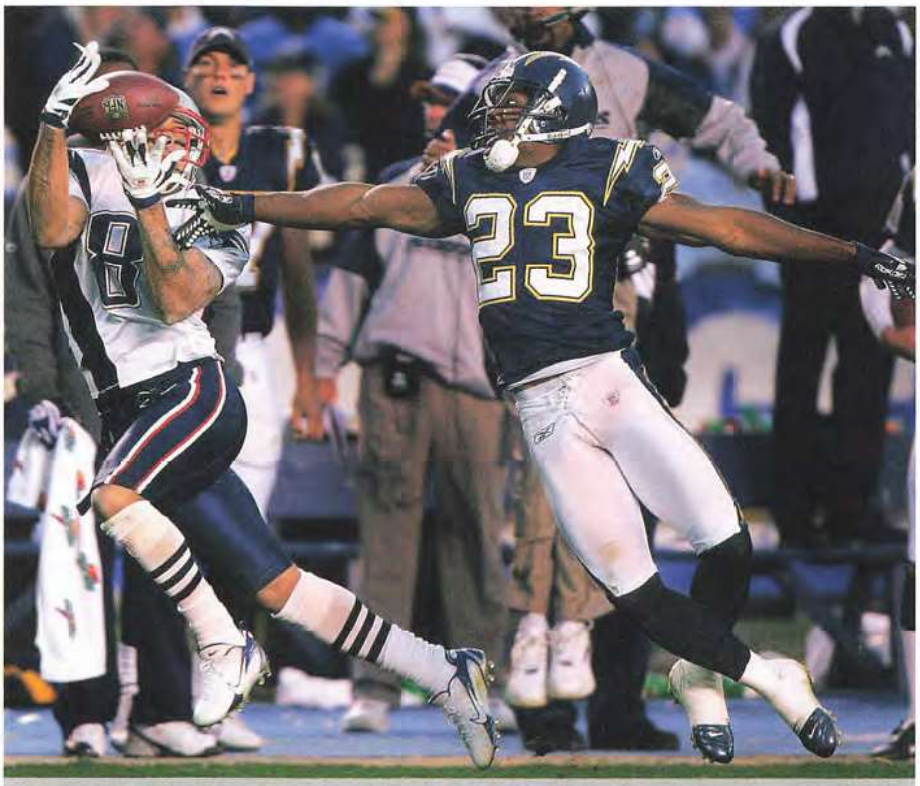
The Chargers had a final chance to tie, but Nate Kaeding's 54-yard field goal attempt in the final seconds sailed wide right.

"That was a great team we beat," said Brady. "[To score] 24 points on that defense...that's not a bad day." —*Mark Preston*



Paul Spinelli/Getty Images

The Patriots' Troy Brown reaches in to force a critical fumble from Marlon McCree.



Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

Reche Caldwell's 49-yard catch down the right sideline set up Stephen Gostkowski's game-winning field goal.

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NFC DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

@ New Orleans 27, Philadelphia 24

The Eagles' magical run toward the Big Game was stopped cold in the Big Easy, leaving New Orleans to march on to unchartered territory following a sweet triumph at the Dome.

Riding their talented tandem of running backs—Deuce McAllister and Reggie Bush—the Saints, who topped the NFL regular season in passing and total offense, won a ground war, racking up 208 yards rushing, including a team playoff-record 143 from McAllister.

"Deuce was fantastic tonight," said Saints coach Sean Payton after the 27-24 win that advanced the NFC South champs into the conference title game for the first time in their history. "Nobody was going to stop him. He ran his heart out."

In truth, the Saints had shown that sort of heart all year, playing not just for themselves, but to inspire the injured city they represent.

"It's just the determination of this team and this city," said McAllister, who scored on a pair of touchdown runs, including an 11-yarder late in the third quarter that moved New Orleans ahead for good. "We want to give them everything we have."

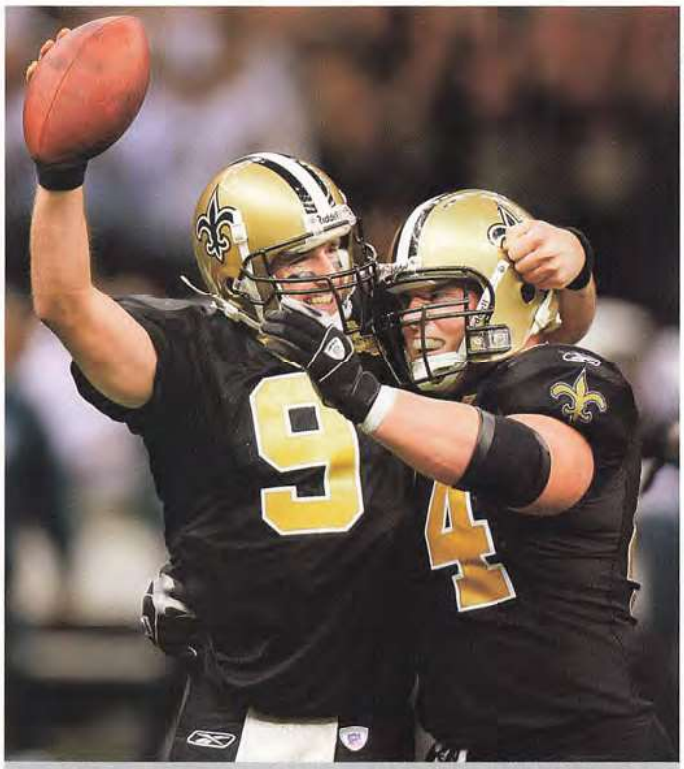
After two John Carney field goals put the Saints in front 6-0, Philadelphia took the lead when Jeff Garcia launched a 75-yard TD pass to Donté Stallworth, the sort of big-play magic that the Eagles had employed during the six-game win streak they carried into the contest. Garcia finished the night 15-of-30 for 240 yards and led Philly on three touchdown drives of more than 75 yards.

Bush's 4-yard run capped a 14-play, 78-yard drive that gave the lead back to the Saints, but Brian Westbrook put the Eagles up before halftime with a leaping 1-yard touchdown, part of his 116-yard performance.

Westbrook opened the third quarter with a playoff franchise-record 62-yard TD run, but McAllister took over from there. He scored on a 5-yard run that brought the Saints within 21-20 and then capped the team's next drive with his second touchdown of the game.

A David Akers field goal pulled the Eagles within three points, and Philly had one final shot after recovering a fumble with just 3:18 to go. But the Saints' defense held firm, getting the ball back and converting a critical first down before running out the clock.

"This year, some things have happened for us," McAllister said. "Now, it's like, 'Wow, this just may be destiny.'"



G.M. Andrews/US Presswire

Drew Brees (No. 9) and Mike Karney had the Saints marching to the NFC title game.

Al Messerschmidt/Wirelmage.com

Deuce McAllister sets his sights on the end zone with the go-ahead touchdown late in the third quarter.

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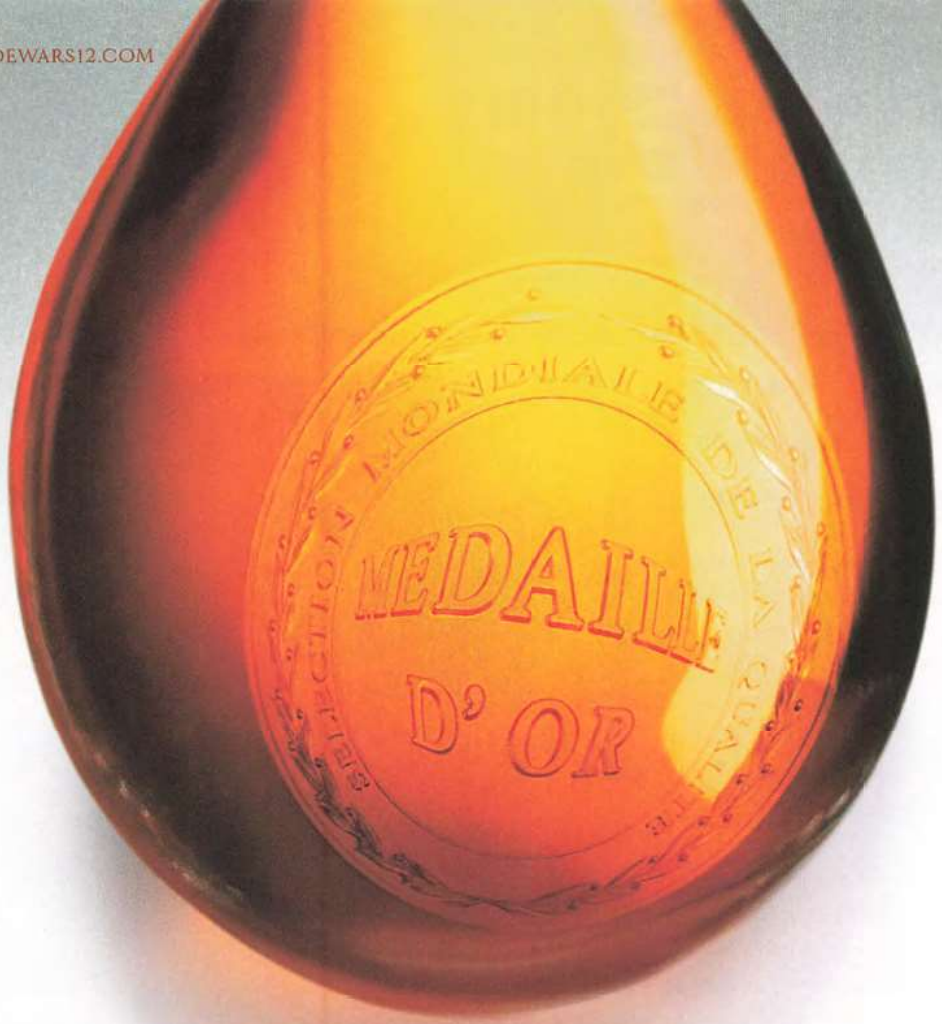

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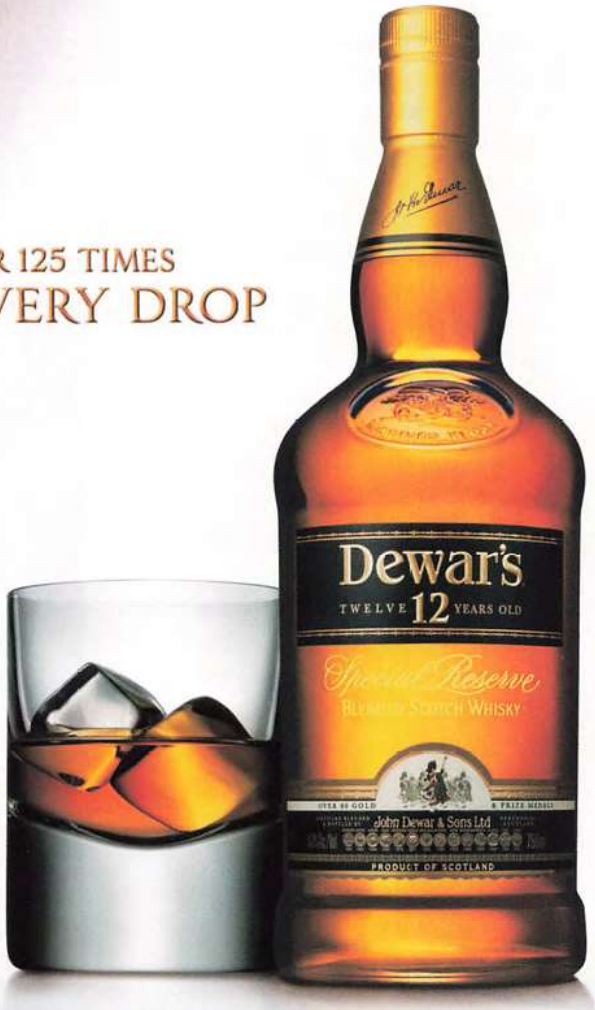

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NFC DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

@ CHICAGO 27, SEATTLE 24 (OT)

In the end, Rex Grossman was good enough and Robbie Gould was long enough to carry the top-seeded Bears to a thrilling overtime win over the defending NFC champion Seahawks.

Grossman completed 21-of-38 passes for 282 yards and a touchdown, stepping up his game after struggling in his final regular-season performance. Coming off the bye week, the fourth-year pro—who led Chicago to the NFC's best record—was the picture of poise, throwing for the second-most yards in Bears playoff history.

"There was a lot of pressure on [Rex]...I thought he handled it well," said Bears coach Lovie Smith.

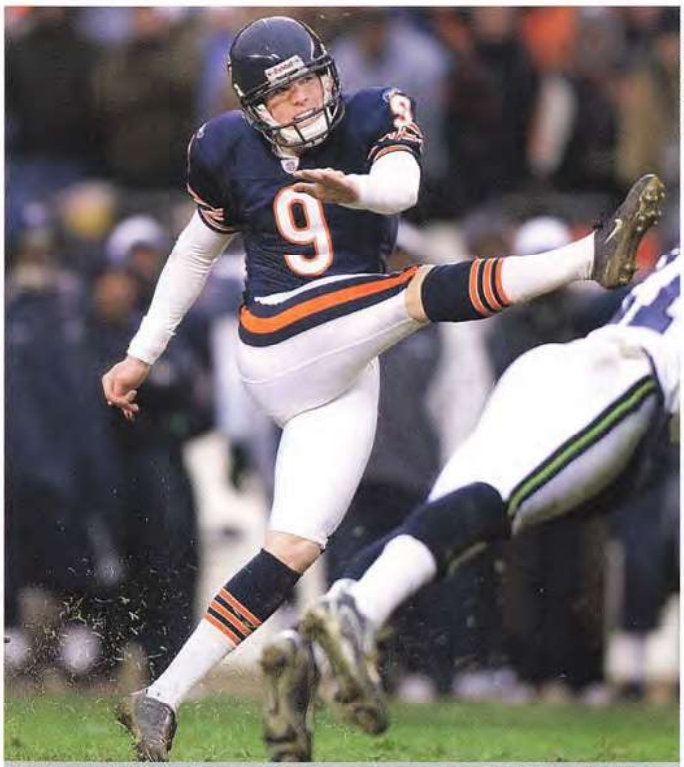
Chicago opened the scoring on a 9-yard run from Thomas Jones, part of his 66-yard, two-touchdown performance. The Seahawks pulled even at the start of the second quarter when Matt Hasselbeck hit Nate Burleson with a 16-yard touchdown pass. However, that tie lasted all of 18 seconds, as Grossman fired a 68-yard scoring strike to Bernard Berrian on the Bears' next play from scrimmage.

Seattle again answered, this time when Shaun Alexander capped a short drive with a 4-yard run. The league's 2005 MVP, sidelined by injuries in his team's regular-season loss to the Bears, put up solid numbers in this contest, rushing for 108 yards and scoring twice.

Jones' second touchdown run gave the Bears the lead at the half, but the third quarter belonged to Seattle with the Seahawks tacking on 10 points—the result of a 40-yard Josh Brown field goal and Alexander's 13-yard TD run. Gould kicked a 41-yard field goal with 4:24 to go in the final period, knotting the game at 24-24. Though both teams threatened down the stretch, the game carried into an extra session, the NFC's first overtime playoff game since 2003.

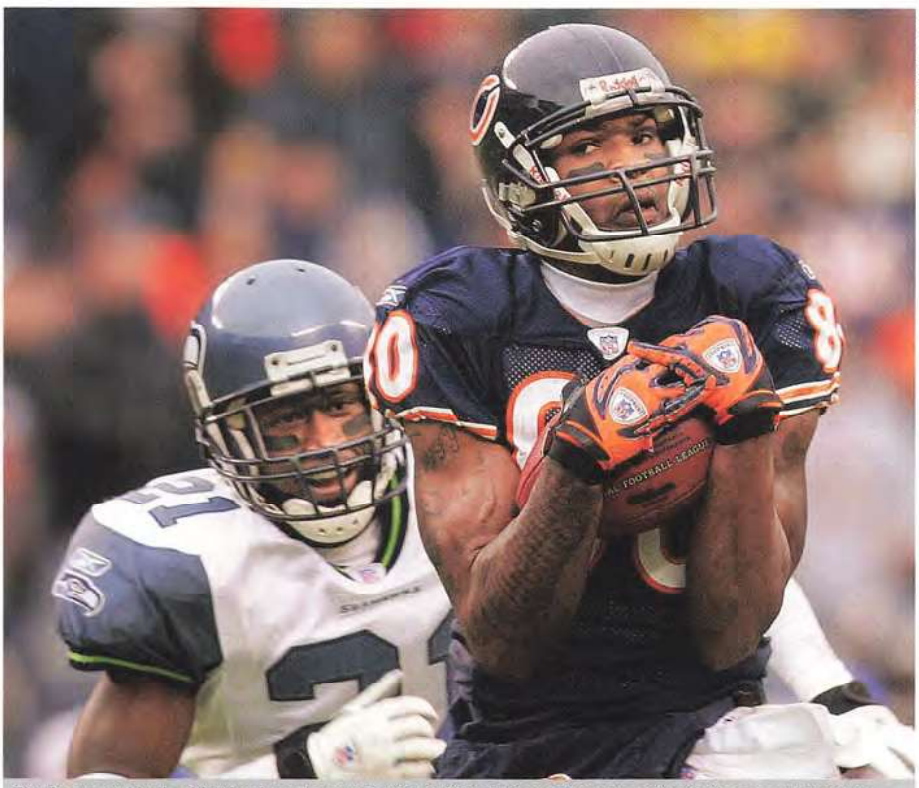
The Seahawks got the ball first but the Bears' defense held, then forced a short punt from Ryan Plackemeier that gave Chicago great field position. On third down, Grossman hit Rashied Davis for a 30-yard gain, setting up Gould. The former construction worker, who entered the NFL as an undrafted free agent, connected from 49 yards out for the win.

"A year ago, I'm pounding nails," said Gould, who made 32 of 36 field goals during the regular season and led the NFC in scoring. "Now I'm hitting game-winning kicks and going to the NFC Championship Game."



David Stluka/Getty Images

Robbie Gould follows through on his game-winning 49-yard field goal in OT.



Reuters/WireImage.com

The Bears grabbed a 14-7 lead on Bernard Berrian's 68-yard touchdown reception in the second quarter.

SHEER SHULA

THE LEGENDARY DOLPHINS COACH HAS MYRIAD INTERESTS, BUT FOOTBALL ALWAYS WILL BE HIS PASSION.

by Andy Cohen

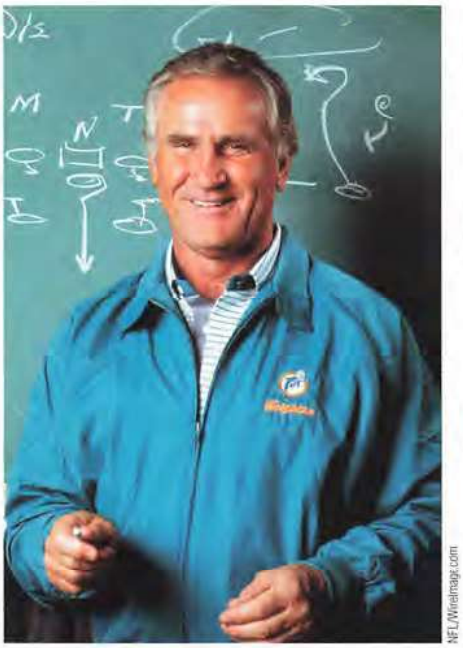
The famous jaw remains firmly in place, though it's not quite as intimidating as it once was. His eyes are still powerful, his look still intense.

And while you may only catch glimpses of him these days—it's been 11 years since he last patrolled the game's sidelines—rest assured that Don Shula, a Pro Football Hall of Famer and the NFL's all-time winningest coach, is loving life.

Sure, the competitive fires still burn deep inside him, especially on Sunday afternoons and Monday nights. That's a given for a man who won 347 games and reached more Super Bowls (six) than any coach in history.

"That [gameday] is when I miss it the most," says Shula, who spent seven years as head coach of the Baltimore Colts followed by 26 with the Dolphins until his retirement after the 1995 season. "The excitement, the emotional ups and downs that go on in that three-hour period, is unlike anything else you do in life. There's just no way to replace it."

What he doesn't miss are the long days of preparation, the late-night meetings, the film sessions, and the battle within the battle to stay on top. Now, just a few weeks after his 77th birthday—he was born Jan. 4, 1930, in Grand River, Ohio (population 289)—Donald Francis Shula wears the smile and the look of a man at peace.



NFL/WireImage.com

At peace with himself. At peace with life. And at peace with the legacy he has left behind.

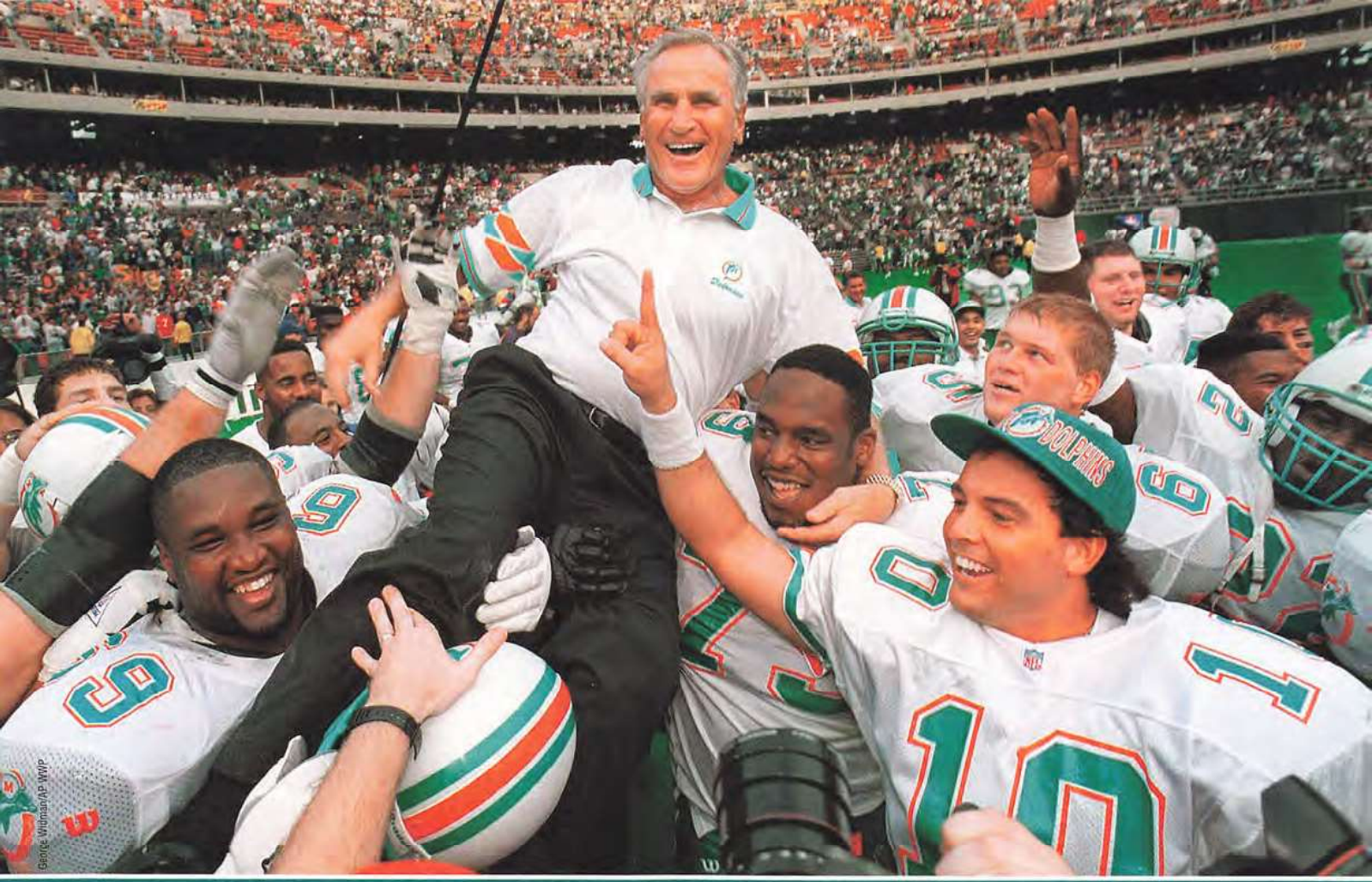
"I coached for 33 years and spent a total of 43 years as a part of the NFL—as a player, an assistant, and a head coach," he says. "But now I'm getting a chance to do all the things I never could while coaching. It's a different world for me. Life has been good."

And continues to be. There are 27 steak houses bearing his name (with more on the way), an enterprise run by his oldest son, David, in Miami Lakes, Fla. There's a gorgeous house on the water in Indian Creek Island in Miami, a posh condo on the Spanish Bay Golf Course near Pebble Beach, Calif., and another home in the mountains of Linville, N.C., not too far from where Bob Griese spends his summers. (The coach and his two-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback have a lot to reminisce about, don't you think?) When not traveling around the country, Shula and his wife, Mary Anne, are traveling around the world—Africa, a cruise on the Amazon, the Far East, New Zealand, and all over Europe.

He stays in shape, too, though his knees are sore and he can't jog like he once did. But he does golf two to three times a week and exercises by doing Pilates on a near-daily basis. *Don Shula doing Pilates?* Hard to imagine.

Shula also remains a highly sought-after motivational speaker, has ongoing endorsement deals, and continues his boundless devotion to the Don Shula Foundation for Breast Cancer Research, started years ago when his first wife, Dorothy, succumbed to that dreaded disease.

There's plenty of room for football, too. When his son, Michael, was head coach at the University of Alabama, Shula made it to about



Shula is carried off the field by jubilant Dolphins players in 1993 after breaking George Halas' NFL mark for coaching wins. He retired two years later with 347 victories.

half of the Crimson Tide's games each year, while his suite at Dolphin Stadium is filled on home Sundays starting in October. Sometimes Shula sits there with just a few close friends, carefully analyzing events on the field, unable to resist wondering if he would have called a timeout just then or if he would have used that same blitz package.

Even deep in retirement, he is still Coach Shula. Always Coach Shula.

"I keep up with the game," he says. "I read a lot and watch as much football as I can."

For a long while, the game was busy keeping up with him. After graduating from John Carroll University, Shula spent seven years as an NFL player—he intercepted 21 passes while lining up at cornerback for the Browns, Colts, and Redskins—before his focus turned to coaching. First, he entered the collegiate ranks, working at Virginia and then Kentucky. He then became an assistant with the Detroit Lions in 1960 and three years later, at age 33, headed to Baltimore as the youngest head coach in the NFL's modern era.

It evolved into a fascinating four-decade journey, with Shula carving a niche that earned him the respect of peers, players, and opponents—all while earning a place in the league's record book. In today's pressure-packed coaching world, one wonders if anyone will approach his record for victories. It is something Shula has never taken for granted.

"Whenever you're associated with an accomplishment that has never been done before, it's something you are proud of," says Shula, who guided his teams to a .500 or better record in 31 of his 33 seasons and reached the playoffs on 23 occasions. "It's always great to see your name on top for the most coaching victories."

He looks back on his career with fondness...and just a touch of regret.

"Some of my greatest memories are the people I coached against," he says. "Having the opportunity as a rookie coach to look across the field and see George Halas on the other sideline, I'll never forget that thrill. To think years later I'd have the chance to break his coaching record, well, that's very special.

"And I got to coach against [Vince] Lombardi, [Tom] Landry, [Chuck] Noll, and Marv Levy, legends in our game and guys I respected so much. I was also very fortunate to have great assistants at my side, people like Bill Arnsparger, Howard Schnellenberger, Monte Clark, John Sandusky, and Carl Taseff."

Then there are the players who made all his success possible, including 15 who are enshrined with Shula in Canton.

"The guy I enjoyed coaching the most was Larry Csonka," he says of the Hall of Fame running back and Super Bowl VIII MVP. "He kept it loose during the week, but on gameday he was so determined to make it happen. Then there was the excitement of being part of Dan Marino's career. When you look back and realize he's the leading passer of all time, it means a lot."

His pride leads to the understandable disappointment of never winning a Super Bowl with Marino. It bothers Shula to this day.

"Being in one in Dan's second year," he says of the Dolphins' trip to Super Bowl XIX following the 1984 season (a 38-16 setback to the Joe Montana-led 49ers), "we thought we'd be in a lot more together. But it just never worked out that way."

Two of Shula's trips to the Super Bowl did result in championships;

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USPresswire

(Left) **Shula greets his son, Mike, then an assistant coach with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, following a 1988 game.** (Below) **Shula as a rookie with the Cleveland Browns in 1951. He spent seven seasons as an NFL player before entering the coaching ranks.**

one of the defeats, meanwhile, paved the way for his move to the Dolphins.

"That first Super Bowl when I was with Baltimore [a 16-7 setback to the New York Jets in Super Bowl III] had such a big impact on my career," he says.

"It pretty much ended my relationship with Carroll Rosenbloom [the owner of the Colts], and it led to me coming to Miami, which turned out to be a great career move."

He departed Baltimore following the 1969 season after compiling a 71-23-4 mark and winning four division titles.

The Monument City's loss turned out to be the Magic City's gain, for what soon followed were the two greatest back-to-back seasons in NFL history: the acclaimed 17-0 Dolphins of 1972 and a 1973 team that, although it lost two games on its way to capturing Super Bowl VIII over Minnesota, may have been even more talented than that "perfect" team.

NFL/Wirelmage.com

"I would have wanted to win more than the two Super Bowls, given I was there six times," Shula admits. "That's a disappointment. But the 1972 season was so special. I'm reminded of it every year when another team makes a run at the record. Everyone involved with that [Miami] team takes so much pride in that accomplishment."

Of course, if someone does come along to match those undefeated Dolphins, Shula says, "We'll be the first in line to congratulate them."

Those words alone tell you that whenever the league is searching for a spokesman, it need look no further than its winningest coach. Sure, a few things annoy him about today's game—the excessive celebrations and some of the greed. But you won't get him to talk much about what he doesn't like. He remains loyal through and through.

"The NFL is head and shoulders above any other league," contends Shula. "When I was a player, Bert Bell was the commissioner. Then early in my coaching career it was Pete Rozelle, followed by Paul Tagliabue. This league has always had strong leadership, classy people at the top, and that continues to be the case. The owners have done a great job of maximizing everything they have to sell, and they've done it in a first-class manner.

"People talk about the salary cap and free agency, but, in truth, I don't think the NFL has changed that much. The way I look at it, there is still one team that figures it out and wins it all. And no matter the circumstances, you want to be the coach who figures it out, not the coach who complains about it. Every year, I take my hat off to that coach who does figure it out."

Shula can talk for hours about his years in the NFL—the great victories, the tough losses, and the players he admired most. In many ways, the league became a second family to him.

"Sometimes I have an easier time remembering the games than I do the names and birthdays of my 16 grandchildren," laughs Shula, a father of five. "So my son Dave came up with a great idea."

On the office wall in Shula's South Florida home—not far from the Lombardi Trophy and the plaque commemorating a hole-in-one, near the keys to the 12 cities that have honored him and the ball signed by the '72 Dolphins—you will find 16 footballs, each painted with a white panel in the front. On each football is the name of a grandchild with his or her birthday on it.

"I just look back [at the wall] and it's all there," Shula says.

The names. The birthdays. His career.

Yes, Don Shula is enjoying life to the fullest. There's always another trip to plan, another golf course to play, and another football season in front of him. There's not much he would change, and not a day passes when he doesn't take time to appreciate his good fortune or where he is today. At peace.

"I have the opportunity now to do all the things I've wanted to do," he says. "I really am enjoying my life after football. Football is such a demanding sport. I spent 43 years at it."

Shula smiles, pauses for a moment, and then that famous jaw dips just a bit. "But it was quite a run."

Andy Cohen has covered the Dolphins since 1980, first as a beat writer for the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel *and since 1988 as editor of* Dolphin Digest. *He also is general manager of Curtis Publishing Company, which specializes in producing football publications.*

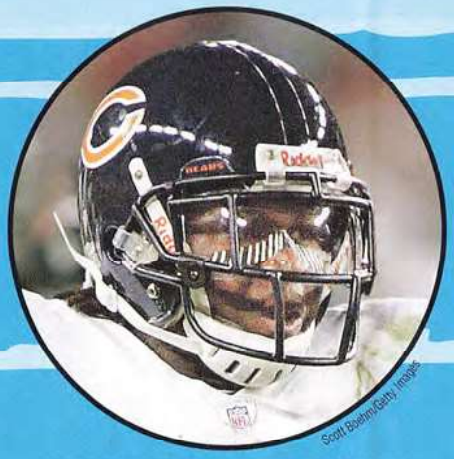
ROOKIE SALUTE

The Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week and Rookie of the Year programs have completed a fifth successful year. Over one million fans voted at www.nfl.com to determine the 2006 Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Year. A strong and balanced rookie class was evident with more than three dozen players being nominated for Rookie of the Week and 10 different players capturing Rookie of the Week honors at least once during the 2006 NFL season.

The winner, announced Thursday, February 1, was chosen from a field of five outstanding players who were the top vote-getters during the Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week program. The 2006 Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Year winner is joining the likes of previous recipients Lofa Tatupu, Ben Roethlisberger, Jeremy Shockey, and Domanick Davis in the hallowed halls of Rookie fame. The NFL and Diet Pepsi congratulate a great rookie class.

NFL Rookie of The Year

2006 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS

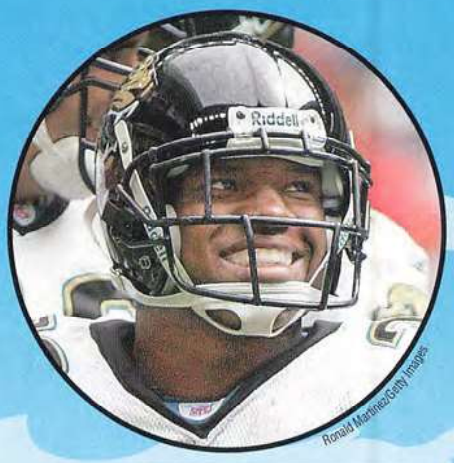


Scott Boehm/Getty Images

Devin Hester
Defensive Back, Bears

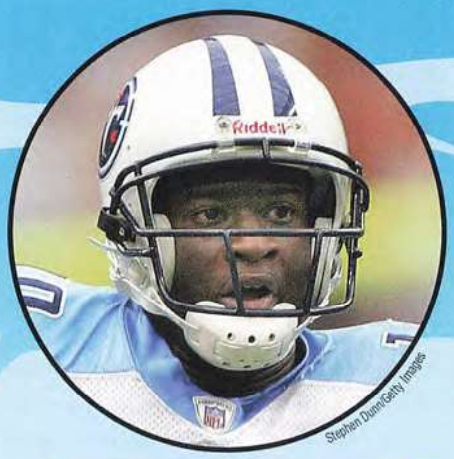
Al Bello/Getty Images

Joseph Addai
Running Back, Colts



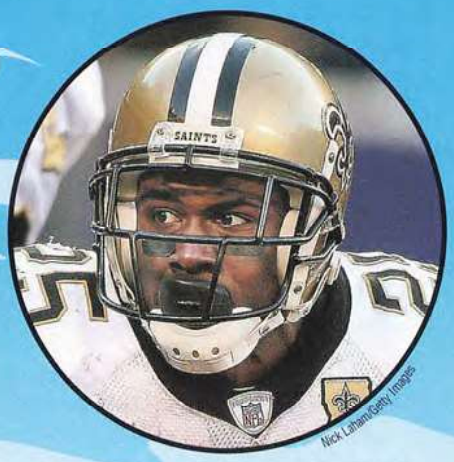
Ronald Martinez/Getty Images

Maurice Jones-Drew
Running Back, Jaguars



Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

Vince Young
Quarterback, Titans



Nick Laham/Getty Images

Reggie Bush
Running Back, Saints

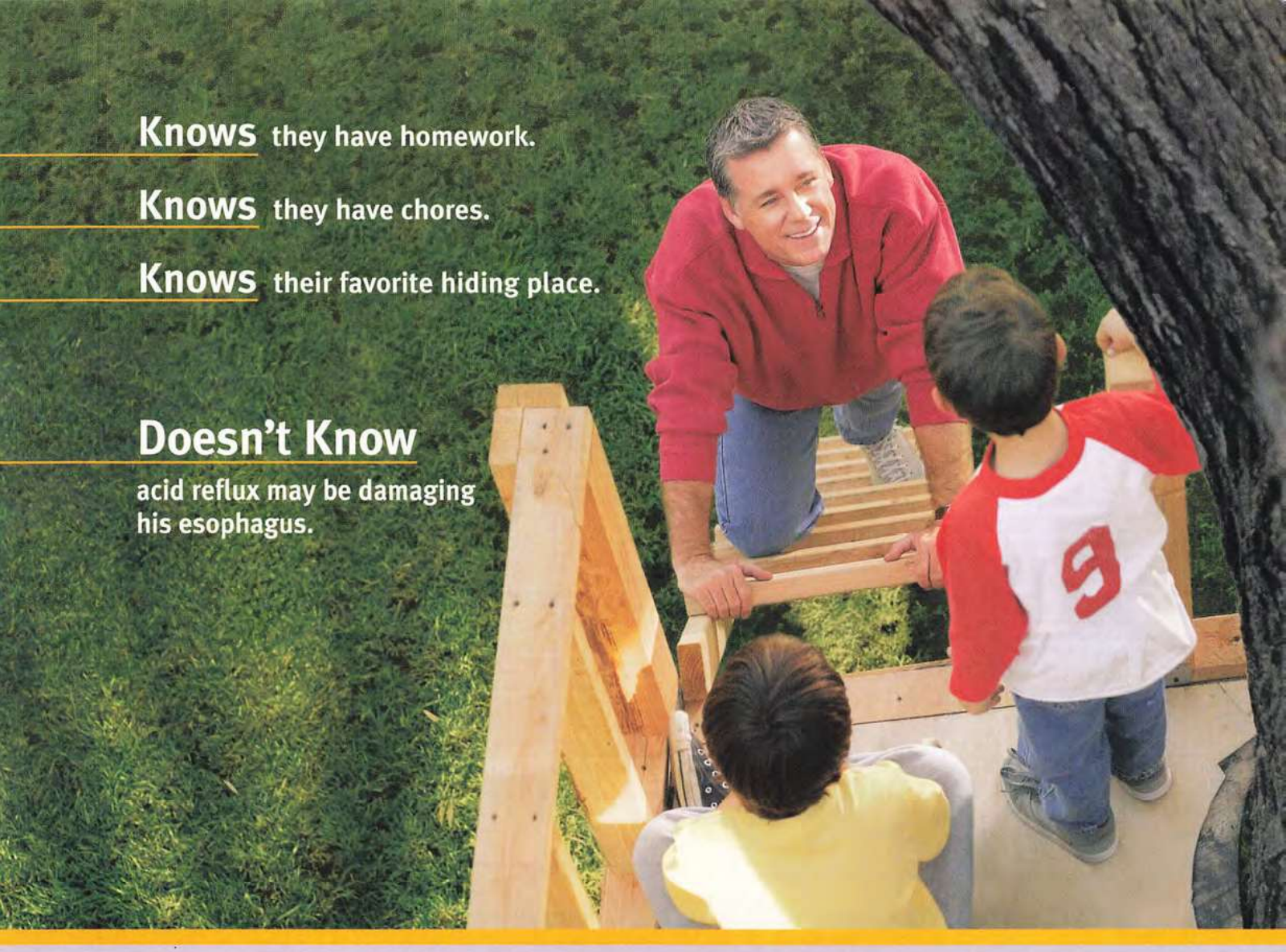
NFL Rookie of the Week PEPSI

2006 DIET PEPSI NFL ROOKIE OF THE WEEK WINNERS

Each week during the 2006 NFL season, fans logged on to www.nfl.com to cast votes for the Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week.

To the right are the 2006 Diet Pepsi NFL Rookie of the Week award winners:

Week 1: Reggie Bush	Week 7: A.J. Hawk	Week 13: Vince Young
Week 2: Manny Lawson	Week 8: Marques Colston	Week 14: Vince Young
Week 3: Greg Jennings	Week 9: Marques Colston	Week 15: Jay Cutler
Week 4: Laurence Maroney	Week 10: A.J. Hawk	Week 16: Vince Young
Week 5: Hank Baskett	Week 11: Santonio Holmes	Week 17: Hank Baskett
Week 6: Santonio Holmes	Week 12: Vince Young	


Knows they have homework.
Knows they have chores.
Knows their favorite hiding place.
Doesn't Know
acid reflux may be damaging his esophagus.

Even if you're treating your heartburn, you may still have damage.

Nexium

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This condition may affect 1 in 3 people with acid reflux disease,* and if left untreated, could get worse. Only a doctor can determine if you have this condition.

However, one prescription NEXIUM pill a day not only provides 24-hour relief from heartburn, for many people it can also heal even the most severe erosions in the esophagus caused by acid reflux. Most erosions heal in 4 to 8 weeks. Your results may vary. NEXIUM has a low occurrence of side effects, which may include headache, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. Symptom relief does not rule out other serious stomach conditions. Ask your doctor if NEXIUM is right for you.

Please read the important Product Information about NEXIUM on the adjacent page and discuss it with your doctor.

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*Source: AstraZeneca Data on File: DA-NEX-58

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Please read this summary carefully, and then ask your doctor about NEXIUM. No advertisement can provide all the information needed to prescribe a drug. This advertisement does not take the place of careful discussions with your doctor. Only your doctor has the training to weigh the risks and benefits of a prescription drug for you.

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20-mg, 40-mg Delayed-Release Capsules

BRIEF SUMMARY of Prescribing Information. **INDICATIONS AND USAGE Treatment of GERD** NEXIUM is indicated for the short-term treatment (4 to 8 weeks) in the healing and symptomatic resolution of diagnostically confirmed erosive esophagitis; the maintenance of symptom resolution and healing of erosive esophagitis (controlled studies do not extend beyond 6 months); the treatment of heartburn and other symptoms associated with GERD; **Risk Reduction of NSAID-Associated Gastric Ulcer; *H.pylori* Eradication to Reduce the Risk of Duodenal Ulcer Recurrence. CONTRAINDICATIONS** NEXIUM is contraindicated in patients with known hypersensitivity to any component of the formulation or to substituted benzimidazoles. **PRECAUTIONS General** Symptomatic response to therapy with NEXIUM does not preclude the presence of gastric malignancy. Atrophic gastritis has been noted occasionally in gastric corpus biopsies from patients treated long-term with omeprazole, of which NEXIUM is an enantiomer. **Information for Patients** NEXIUM Delayed-Release Capsules should be swallowed whole and taken at least one hour before meals. For patients who have difficulty swallowing capsules, one tablespoon of applesauce can be added to an empty bowl and the NEXIUM Delayed-Release Capsule can be opened, and the pellets carefully emptied onto the applesauce. The pellets should be mixed with the applesauce and then swallowed immediately. The applesauce used should not be hot and should be soft enough to be swallowed without chewing. The pellets should not be chewed or crushed. The pellet/applesauce mixture should not be stored for future use. Antacids may be used while taking NEXIUM. **Drug Interactions** Esomeprazole is extensively metabolized in the liver by CYP2C19 and CYP3A4. *In vitro* and *in vivo* studies have shown that esomeprazole is not likely to inhibit CYPs 1A2, 2A6, 2C9, 2D6, 2E1 and 3A4. No clinically relevant interactions with drugs metabolized by these CYP enzymes would be expected. Drug interaction studies have shown that esomeprazole does not have any clinically significant interactions with phenytoin, warfarin, quinidine, clarithromycin or amoxicillin. Post-marketing reports of changes in prothrombin measures have been received among patients on concomitant warfarin and esomeprazole therapy. Increases in INR and prothrombin time may lead to abnormal bleeding and even death. Patients treated with proton pump inhibitors and warfarin concomitantly may need to be monitored for increases in INR and prothrombin time. Esomeprazole may potentially interfere with CYP2C19, the major esomeprazole metabolizing enzyme. Coadministration of esomeprazole 30 mg and diazepam, a CYP2C19 substrate, resulted in a 45% decrease in clearance of diazepam. Increased plasma levels of diazepam were observed 12 hours after dosing and onwards. However, at that time, the plasma levels of diazepam were below the therapeutic interval, and thus this interaction is unlikely to be of clinical relevance. Coadministration of oral contraceptives, diazepam, phenytoin, or quinidine did not seem to change the pharmacokinetic profile of esomeprazole. Concomitant administration of esomeprazole may reduce the plasma levels of atazanavir. Studies evaluating concomitant administration of esomeprazole and either naproxen (non-selective NSAID) or rofecoxib (COX-2 selective NSAID) did not identify any clinically relevant changes in the pharmacokinetic profiles of esomeprazole or these NSAIDs. Esomeprazole inhibits gastric acid secretion. Therefore, esomeprazole may interfere with the absorption of drugs where gastric pH is an important determinant of bioavailability (eg, ketoconazole, iron salts and digoxin). **Carcinogenesis, Mutagenesis, Impairment of Fertility** The carcinogenic potential of esomeprazole was assessed using omeprazole studies. In two 24-month oral carcinogenicity studies in rats, omeprazole at daily doses of 1.7, 3.4, 13.8, 44.0 and 140.8 mg/kg/day (about 0.7 to 57 times the human dose of 20 mg/day expressed on a body surface area basis) produced gastric ECL cell carcinoids in a dose-related manner in both male and female rats; the incidence of this effect was markedly higher in female rats, which had higher blood levels of omeprazole. Gastric carcinoids seldom occur in the untreated rat. In addition, ECL cell hyperplasia was present in all treated groups of both sexes. In one of these studies, female rats were treated with 13.8 mg omeprazole/ kg/day (about 5.6 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) for 1 year, then followed for an additional year without the drug. No carcinoids were seen in these rats. An increased incidence of treatment-related ECL cell hyperplasia was observed at the end of 1 year (94% treated vs 10% controls). By the second year the difference between treated and control rats was much smaller (46% vs 26%) but still showed more hyperplasia in the treated group. Gastric adenocarcinoma was seen in one rat (2%). No similar tumor was seen in male or female rats treated for 2 years. For this strain of rat no similar tumor has been noted historically, but a finding involving only one tumor is difficult to interpret. A 78-week mouse carcinogenicity study of omeprazole did not show increased tumor occurrence, but the study was not conclusive. Esomeprazole was negative in the Ames mutation test, in the *in vivo* rat bone marrow cell chromosome aberration test, and the *in vivo* mouse micronucleus test. Esomeprazole, however, was positive in the *in vitro* human lymphocyte chromosome aberration test. Omeprazole was positive in the *in vitro* human lymphocyte chromosome aberration test, the *in vivo* mouse bone marrow cell chromosome aberration test, and the *in vivo* mouse micronucleus test. The potential effects of esomeprazole on fertility and reproductive performance were assessed using omeprazole studies. Omeprazole at oral doses up to 138 mg/kg/day in rats (about 56 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) was found to have no effect on reproductive performance of parental animals. **Pregnancy** *Teratogenic Effects: Pregnancy Category B* Teratology studies have been performed in rats at oral doses up to 280 mg/kg/day (about 57 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) and in rabbits at oral doses up to 86 mg/kg/day (about 35 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) and have revealed no evidence of impaired fertility or harm to the fetus due to esomeprazole. There are, however, no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Because animal reproduction studies are not always predictive of human response, this drug should be used during pregnancy only if clearly needed. Teratology studies conducted with omeprazole in rats at oral doses up to 138 mg/kg/day (about 56 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) and in rabbits at doses up to 69 mg/kg/day (about 56 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) did not disclose any evidence for a teratogenic potential of omeprazole. In rabbits, omeprazole in a dose range of 6.9 to 69.1 mg/kg/day (about 5.5 to 56 times the human dose on a body surface area basis) produced dose-related increases in embryo-lethality, fetal resorptions, and pregnancy disruptions. In rats, dose-related embryo/fetal toxicity and postnatal developmental toxicity were observed in offspring resulting from parents treated with omeprazole at 13.8 to 138.0 mg/kg/day (about 5.6 to 56 times the human doses on a body surface area basis). There are no adequate and well-controlled studies in pregnant women. Sporadic reports have been received of congenital abnormalities occurring in infants born to women who have received omeprazole during pregnancy. **Nursing Mothers** The excretion of esomeprazole in milk has not been studied. However, omeprazole concentrations have been measured in breast milk of a woman following oral administration of 20 mg. Because esomeprazole is likely to be excreted in human milk, because of the potential for serious adverse reactions in nursing infants from esomeprazole, and because of the potential for tumorigenicity shown for omeprazole in rat carcinogenicity studies, a decision should be made whether to discontinue nursing or to discontinue the drug, taking into account the importance of the drug to the mother. **Pediatric Use** Use of NEXIUM in adolescent patients 12 to 17 years of age for short-term treatment of GERD is supported by a) extrapolation of results, already included in the currently approved labeling, from adequate and well-controlled studies that supported the approval of NEXIUM for adults, and b) safety and pharmacokinetic studies performed in adolescent patients. (See **CLINICAL PHARMACOLOGY, Pharmacokinetics**, *Pediatric* for pharmacokinetic information.) The safety and effectiveness of NEXIUM for the treatment of symptomatic GERD in patients <12 years of age have not been established. The safety and effectiveness of NEXIUM for other pediatric uses have not been established. **12 to 17 Years of Age GERD** In a multicenter, randomized, double-blind, parallel-group study, 149 adolescent patients (12 to 17 years of age; 89 female; 124 Caucasian, 15 Black, 10 Other) with clinically diagnosed GERD were treated with either NEXIUM 20 mg or NEXIUM 40 mg once daily for up to 8 weeks to evaluate safety and tolerability. Patients were not endoscopically characterized as to the presence or absence of erosive esophagitis. The most frequently reported (at least 2%) treatment related adverse events in these patients were headache (8.1%), abdominal pain (2.7%), diarrhea (2%) and nausea (2%). No new safety concerns were identified. **Geriatric Use** Of the total number of patients who received NEXIUM in clinical trials, 1459 were 65 to 74 years of age and 354 patients were ≥75 years of age. No overall differences in safety and efficacy were observed between the elderly and younger individuals, and other reported clinical experience has not identified differences in responses between the elderly and younger patients, but greater sensitivity of some older individuals cannot be ruled out. **ADVERSE REACTIONS** The safety of NEXIUM was evaluated in over 15,000 patients (aged 18-84 years) in clinical trials worldwide including over 8,500 patients in the United States and over 6,500 patients in Europe and Canada. Over 2,900 patients were treated in long-term studies for up to 6-12 months. In general, NEXIUM was well tolerated in both short and long-term clinical trials. A study was performed evaluating the safety of NEXIUM in pediatric patients aged 12-17 for the treatment of symptomatic GERD (see **PRECAUTIONS – Pediatric Use**). The safety in the treatment of healing of erosive esophagitis was assessed in four randomized comparative clinical trials, which included 1,240 patients on NEXIUM 20 mg, 2,434 patients on NEXIUM 40 mg, and 3,008 patients on omeprazole 20 mg daily. The most frequently occurring adverse events (≥1%) in all three groups was headache (5.5, 5.0, and 3.8, respectively) and diarrhea (no difference among the three groups). Nausea, flatulence, abdominal pain, constipation, and dry mouth occurred at similar rates among patients taking NEXIUM or omeprazole. Additional adverse events that were reported as possibly or probably related to NEXIUM with an incidence <1% are listed below by body system: ***Body as a Whole:*** abdomen enlarged, allergic reaction, asthenia, back pain, chest pain, chest pain substernal, facial edema, peripheral edema, hot flushes, fatigue, fever, flu-like disorder, generalized edema, leg edema, malaise, pain, rigors; ***Cardiovascular:*** flushing, hypertension, tachycardia; ***Endocrine:*** goiter; ***Gastrointestinal:*** bowel irregularity, constipation aggravated, dyspepsia, dysphagia, dysplasia GI, epigastric pain, eructation, esophageal disorder, frequent stools, gastroenteritis, GI hemorrhage, GI symptoms not otherwise specified, hiccup, melena, mouth disorder, pharynx disorder, rectal disorder, serum gastrin increased, tongue disorder, tongue edema, ulcerative stomatitis, vomiting; ***Hearing:*** earache, tinnitus; ***Hematologic:*** anemia, anemia hypochromic, cervical lymphoadenopathy, epistaxis, leukocytosis, leukopenia, thrombocytopenia; ***Hepatic:*** bilirubinemia, hepatic function abnormal, SGOT increased, SGPT increased; ***Metabolic/Nutritional:*** glycosuria, hyperuricemia, hyponatremia, increased alkaline phosphatase, thirst, vitamin B12 deficiency, weight increase, weight decrease; ***Musculoskeletal:*** arthralgia, arthritis aggravated, arthropathy, cramps, fibromyalgia syndrome, hernia, polymyalgia rheumatica; ***Nervous System/Psychiatric:*** anorexia, apathy, appetite increased, confusion, depression aggravated, dizziness, hypertonia, nervousness, "hypoesthesia, impotence, insomnia, migraine, migraine aggravated, paresthesia, sleep disorder, somnolence, tremor, vertigo, visual field defect; ***Reproductive:*** dysmenorrhea, menstrual disorder, vaginitis; ***Respiratory:*** asthma aggravated, coughing, dyspnea, larynx edema, pharyngitis, rhinitis, sinusitis; ***Skin and Appendages:*** acne, angioedema, dermatitis, pruritus, pruritus ani, rash, rash erythematous, rash maculo-papular, skin inflammation, sweating increased, urticaria; ***Special Senses:*** otitis media, parosmia, taste loss, taste perversion; ***Urogenital:*** abnormal urine, albuminuria, cystitis, dysuria, fungal infection, hematuria, micturition frequency, moniliasis, genital moniliasis, polyuria; ***Visual:*** conjunctivitis, vision abnormal. Endoscopic findings that were reported as adverse events include: duodenitis, esophagitis, esophageal stricture, esophageal ulceration, esophageal varices, gastric ulcer, gastritis, hernia, benign polyps or nodules, Barrett's esophagus, and mucosal discoloration. Two placebo-controlled studies were conducted in 710 patients for the treatment of symptomatic gastroesophageal reflux disease. The most common adverse events that were reported as possibly or probably related to NEXIUM were diarrhea (4.3%), headache (3.8%), and abdominal pain (3.8%). Postmarketing Reports – There have been spontaneous reports of adverse events with postmarketing use of esomeprazole. These reports occurred rarely and are listed below by body system: ***Blood and Lymphatic System Disorders:*** agranulocytosis, pancytopenia; ***Eye Disorders:*** blurred vision; ***Gastrointestinal Disorders:*** pancreatitis; ***Hepatobiliary Disorders:*** hepatitis with or without jaundice; ***Immune System Disorders:*** anaphylactic reaction/shock; ***Musculoskeletal and Connective Tissue Disorders:*** myalgia; ***Psychiatric Disorders:*** depression; ***Skin and Subcutaneous Tissue Disorders:*** alopecia, erythema multiforme, Stevens-Johnson syndrome, toxic epidermal necrolysis (TEN, some fatal). Other adverse events not observed with NEXIUM, but occurring with omeprazole can be found in the omeprazole package insert, **ADVERSE REACTIONS** section. **OVERDOSAGE** A single oral dose of esomeprazole at 510 mg/kg (about 103 times the human dose on a body surface area basis), was lethal to rats. The major signs of acute toxicity were reduced motor activity, changes in respiratory frequency, tremor, ataxia, and intermittent clonic convulsions. There have been some reports of overdosage with esomeprazole. Reports have been received of overdosage with omeprazole in humans. Doses ranged up to 2,400 mg (120 times the usual recommended clinical dose). Manifestations were variable, but included confusion, drowsiness, blurred vision, tachycardia, nausea, diaphoresis, flushing, headache, dry mouth, and other adverse reactions similar to those seen in normal clinical experience (see omeprazole package insert-**ADVERSE REACTIONS**). No specific antidote for esomeprazole is known. Since esomeprazole is extensively protein bound, it is not expected to be removed by dialysis. In the event of overdosage, treatment should be symptomatic and supportive. As with the management of any overdose, the possibility of multiple drug ingestion should be considered. For current information on treatment of any drug overdose, a certified Regional Poison Control Center should be contacted. Telephone numbers are listed in the Physicians' Desk Reference (PDR) or local telephone book. **DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION** Please see full Prescribing Information for recommended dosages and dosage adjustments for **Special Populations** for NEXIUM.

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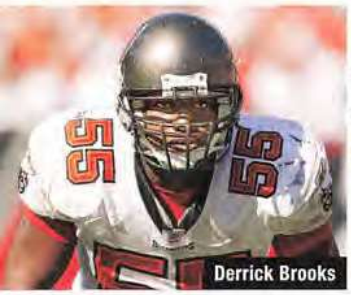
PRO BOWL www.nfl.com/probowl

The Pro Bowl returns to Hawaii for the 28th straight year as the AFC All-Stars battle their NFC counterparts on Saturday, Feb. 10, at Aloha Stadium. NFL Network's *Total Access* show will air from Hawaii the entire week, and CBS Sports is televising the game live at 6 p.m. (EST). The 43-man AFC and NFC All-Star squads are made up of the consensus votes of fans, players, and coaches—the only such system in pro sports. In last year's game, Tampa Bay linebacker Derrick Brooks, who returned an interception for a touchdown, was voted MVP of the NFC's 23-17 win. The Pro Bowl series is now tied, 18-18.



Michael Montes/Wirelmage.com

Derrick Brooks

NFL SCOUTING COMBINE www.nfl.com

Pro hopefuls will be in Indianapolis for the NFL Scouting Combine, and NFL fans can follow it all. NFL Network is the exclusive television home of the Scouting Combine, which takes place Feb. 21-27 at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis. With access to daily workouts, head coaches, front-office personnel, and players, NFL Network's coverage will give fans exclusive insights to see how teams are preparing for the upcoming NFL Draft. In addition, the *Total Access* crew will be on the scene with news, analysis, and interviews all week.

NFL EUROPA www.nfleurope.com

The 15th season of NFL Europa—featuring the Amsterdam Admirals, Berlin Thunder, Cologne Centurions, Frankfurt Galaxy, Hamburg Sea Devils, and Rhein Fire—kicks off on Saturday, April 14. Last year's championship went to the Galaxy, marking their record-breaking fourth league title, when they defeated Amsterdam, 22-7, in World Bowl XIV. This year's title game, Yello Strom World Bowl XV, takes place on Saturday, June 23, at Frankfurt's Commerzbank-Arena and will be televised in more than 150 countries. NFL Network will again carry NFL Europa games.

NFL DRAFT www.nfl.com/draft

It's the most exciting weekend of the off-season! The 72nd NFL Draft is slated for April 28-29 at Radio City Music Hall in New York City, starting at 12 noon each day. ESPN and NFL Network will televise the proceedings live, and fans can follow all the picks on www.nfl.com. Those interested in attending the draft can go to the NFL's web site for ticket information. The Oakland Raiders hold the first selection in this year's draft. Last year, the Texans chose North Carolina State defensive end Mario Williams with the first pick.

Ed Betz/AP WWP

Paul Tagliabue and Mario Williams

HALL OF FAME www.profootballhof.com

Hall of Fame Weekend 2007 is set for Aug. 3-5 in Canton, Ohio. That's when the latest group of NFL legends will be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. A big part of the weekend festivities is the AFC-NFC Hall of Fame Game—a tradition since 1962—that's set to take place on Sunday, Aug. 5, at Fawcett Stadium. Last year's game was won by the Raiders over the Eagles. For ticket and group package information for this year's Hall of Fame events, call (330) 456-8207.

Courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

CHINA BOWL www.nfl.com

The Patriots and Seahawks will help the NFL achieve another landmark when they play in the first-ever China Bowl on Thursday, Aug. 9, at Beijing's Workers Stadium. The preseason contest takes place one year before the start of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and will be televised live across China by CCTV and also live in the United States by NBC (8:30 a.m. EDT on Aug. 9).

NFL KICKOFF 2007 www.nfl.com

The NFL's 88th season officially begins on Thursday, Sept. 6, with big celebrations in two locations. Expanding on a tradition that started in 2004, *NFL Kickoff Live* will include events at the home of the Super Bowl XLI champion and also in Glendale, Ariz., site of Super Bowl XLII. Diddy, Rascal Flatts, and Martina McBride were among the artists performing on Miami Beach and at Heinz Field prior to the Steelers' 2006 opener against the Dolphins. Willie Parker then ran for 115 yards, helping carry Pittsburgh to a 28-17 win.

Jim McIsaac/Getty Image

Willie Parker

Courtesy of Arizona Cardinals

SUPER BOWL XLII www.superbowl.com

The Super Bowl makes its second trip to Arizona when the University of Phoenix Stadium, a spectacular 63,400-seat facility that opened this season and is home to the Arizona Cardinals, hosts Super Bowl XLII on Sunday, Feb. 3, 2008. The contest will be televised by FOX. A limited number of game tickets are available through a random drawing. Requests are accepted starting Feb. 1, 2007, and must be sent via certified or registered mail. Send your request (limited to one per address) to:
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YET Centers provide a lasting presence in Super Bowl host cities.

NFL YOUTH EDUCATION * TOWN *

Since 1993, the NFL has constructed Youth Education Towns in Super Bowl host cities. In partnership with Boys & Girls Clubs and a network of local nonprofit organizations, the NFL YET initiative is devoted to positively impacting youngsters who reside in at-risk neighborhoods in these cities. The league donates $1 million annually toward the project, with additional funding coming from local public and private donations.

YET Centers offer tutoring, mentoring, career training, computer education, and access to athletic programs. They are designed to help kids succeed while providing educational assistance, job training, technical instruction, life-skills development, and recreational outlets. Facilities are unique but all include libraries, classrooms, technology labs, and fitness centers.

Since 1993, 15 YETs have been dedicated in 12 cities—two each in Tampa, San Diego, and Houston, and one in Los Angeles, Atlanta, Detroit, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Phoenix, New Orleans, Honolulu, and Jacksonville.

ATLANTA Located between the historic Grant Park and Summer Hill communities, Atlanta's YET includes a 6,500-square foot office and classroom facility, gymnasium, and a 70-yard football field. The academic building houses a pair of state-of-the-art computer labs. Last year, the site experienced a 17 percent increase in registrations.

DETROIT Last spring, construction began on the YET Center in Detroit, the largest YET project ever undertaken. The $6 million facility will include a gym, game room, teen center, multimedia studio, arts and crafts center, playground, and outdoor athletic field. It will serve more than 2,500 young people per year.

FORT LAUDERDALE Since its opening, the YET in Fort Lauderdale has ranked among that area's premier centers for youngsters. In 2007, the center will add a new multimedia lab with a recording studio, graphic design stations, and access to advanced software technology.

HONOLULU As the host to the NFL Pro Bowl game, the NFL YET in Honolulu is the first center outside of a Super Bowl host city. The 20,000-square foot facility will consist of an arts and crafts center, community room, teen center, learning center, technology center and multimedia studio, gymnasium and athletic field, locker rooms, and meeting rooms.

HOUSTON Last February, the NFL broke ground on two YETs in Houston. The first YET opened in late September and has enrolled more than 500 youth. On Dec. 7, 2006, the Houston YET held a ceremony with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America as it became the 4,000th Boys & Girls Club to open in the country.

JACKSONVILLE In 2005, the Jacksonville YET was dedicated at a ceremony during the week of Super Bowl XXXIX. With the help of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida and several community organizations, the NFL is preparing for the groundbreaking and construction of the center this year. It will be built on two acres of the Catherine Hester McNair Park in the Brentwood neighborhood in northwest Jacksonville.

LOS ANGELES The NFL's first YET Center has delivered educational programs and social services to young people and their families since 1993. Four years ago, the center relocated to a new 15,000-square foot facility in Harbor City. It has a full-size regulation gymnasium, art center, library, audio/video digital studio, and computer lab.

MIAMI The YET at Gwen Cherry Park is a 22,000-square foot center benefiting residents of Miami-Dade County. It served more than 2,000 youth last year and renovations this year include a new multimedia center, addition of stadium seating for the football field, and a new gymnasium floor. Both of the center's computer labs are being upgraded to have wireless systems. In January 2007, the Willis McGahee Celebrity Flag Football tournament raised much-needed funds for the YET Center.

Photos courtesy of the NFL

NEW ORLEANS On September 19, 2006, New Orleans Saints players and staff helped reopen the New Orleans YET Center, barely a year after it had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. All services had been discontinued after the hurricane flooded the center with six feet of water, causing nearly $1 million in damage. The newly opened 8,500-square foot facility features a state-of-the-art game room, computer center, computer technology lab, multimedia arts center, and a children's library.

PHOENIX The YET Center in Phoenix has partnered with local non-profits in an effort to develop a new generation of leaders in the city's Hispanic community. This YET Center includes a charter school and after-school programs to better serve the area's most in-need families. The 10,000-square foot facility, which focuses on youth ages 9 to 18, features a state-of-the-art computer room.

SAN DIEGO San Diego is home to a pair of YET Centers; one in Golden Hill and a second in City Heights. In the past year, they have each introduced new programming, including the "Be Proud! Be Responsible!" character development project and a county-sponsored "Critical Hours" after-school program.

TAMPA Tampa also enjoys the presence of two YET Center campuses. The first one opened in Jackson Heights in May of 2002; a second opened a year later in Hillsborough County. These facilities feature computer labs, money management classes, cultural activities, and community service projects.

SOUTH FLORIDA'S ETERNAL STAR

by Jim Trotter

Courtesy of Pro Football Hall of Fame

A tropical storm was looming and the much-anticipated finale of the inaugural *Survivor* series was set to air, but you'd never have known it seven years ago in Pro Player [now Dolphin] Stadium, where every available seat had a body in it and every sun-tanned face had a smile on it.

A crowd of more than 52,000 had packed the place to honor Dan Marino, the legendary quarterback who broke nearly every major passing record during his 17 seasons with the Miami Dolphins, and neither bad weather nor a reality show was going to interrupt their party. And make no mistake, this was a party: a seven-figure celebration replete with fireworks, a concert by Hootie & the Blowfish, a star-studded list of special guests and dignitaries, and the ear-piercing chants of "one more year."

Hall of Fame quarterback Terry Bradshaw attended the event. At one point he stopped, looked, and listened to the emotion raining down on Marino. Then he shook his head and lifted the microphone to speak.

"This doesn't happen in the National Football League," he said. "The love you're showing tonight is unprecedented, and hats off to Miami."

Truth be told, the reception shouldn't have come as a surprise to Bradshaw or anyone else. The relationship between Dan Marino and South Florida runs deeper than athlete-fan. He may have grown up in Pittsburgh, but he was adopted by Miami and its surrounding communities almost immediately upon his arrival in 1983.

Marino's powerful right arm signaled a new era for the Dolphins. Long a power running team, they no longer would travel by land, not when they had a quarterback whose release was as quick as his football mind (which is saying a lot, considering Marino often saw holes in the defense before they appeared).

Any questions about Marino's ability were answered in his second season, when he threw for a league-record 5,084 yards and 48 TDs and took Miami to the Super Bowl. The 49ers prevailed in what would be Marino's only title-game appearance, but there was no denying he would leave his fingerprints on the NFL record book by the time he was done.

"When Danny came in as a rookie and set the world on fire, he set the bar awfully high for the rest of us in the class," says fellow Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway, the first pick in the 1983 NFL Draft. "From that point on, we were all chasing Danny."

South Floridians saw Marino evolve from Pennsylvania cool to Florida chic. His hair changed from curly to straight, and his eyes went from wide to focused.

"It's hard to put into words how highly Dan is regarded in South Florida," says John Kross, who goes by the name Footy and for years was a morning radio host in the area. "No. 1, he's the greatest football player who ever stepped on the field, as far as we're concerned. No. 2, he's a real, true South Floridian. He's one of us. He lives here, does events here, signs autographs here, visits kids here.

"And No. 3—and probably most important—is what he has done for this community in terms of giving his time to help us, the people."

Since its inception in 1992, the Dan Marino Foundation has raised more than $21 million for medical research, while funding treatment programs and outreach services for youngsters with chronic illnesses and developmental disabilities. Its most notable accomplishment was the construction of the Dan Marino Center as part of Miami Children's Hospital. Located in Weston, Fla., the center sees more than 20,000 children annually and serves as a medical consortium where children with disabilities can be evaluated and treated by some of the nation's finest specialists.

"Forget anything I ever did on the field," said an emotional Marino when the center opened. "This is the most incredible thing I have ever been around in my life."

Marino's generosity with his time, particularly when it comes to kids, is legendary. Known for his fiery temperament on the field, it was not uncommon for him to flip the switch by the time he reached the Dolphins locker room, where representatives from the Make-A-Wish Foundation might be waiting for him with a guest.

He usually would give the child a game ball or some other keepsake, but, more valuable, he'd give his time. Part of that stems from how he was raised, and part has to do with what he's experienced in his own adult life.

"I've been blessed," Marino says. "My wife, Claire, and I have six kids. We just feel it's so important to have an impact that way, to give back. When my son Michael was two, he was diagnosed with autism, and I got so much help in this community at a critical time in his life.

"The first couple of years are so important for kids with this disorder, and I've always felt a responsibility to help others in the same situation we were in with Michael. We still raise money for autism and for kids with developmental disorders because I know we've been blessed with Michael and how well his situation has turned out. Hopefully our efforts will help someone else have the same positive results."

That boundless compassion is another reason why Dolphins fans packed Pro Player Stadium back in 2000 and then overtook Canton, Ohio, two summers ago when Marino was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The adoration runs both ways.

"I looked at it as an honor to play in South Florida, and to be in one place for 17 years is unique," he says. "A lot of professional athletes don't get that opportunity to spend their entire career with one team and become part of the community, and I'll always be thankful for that."

Jim Trotter has covered the NFL for The San Diego Union-Tribune *for 11 years, the first nine as the beat writer for the Chargers.*

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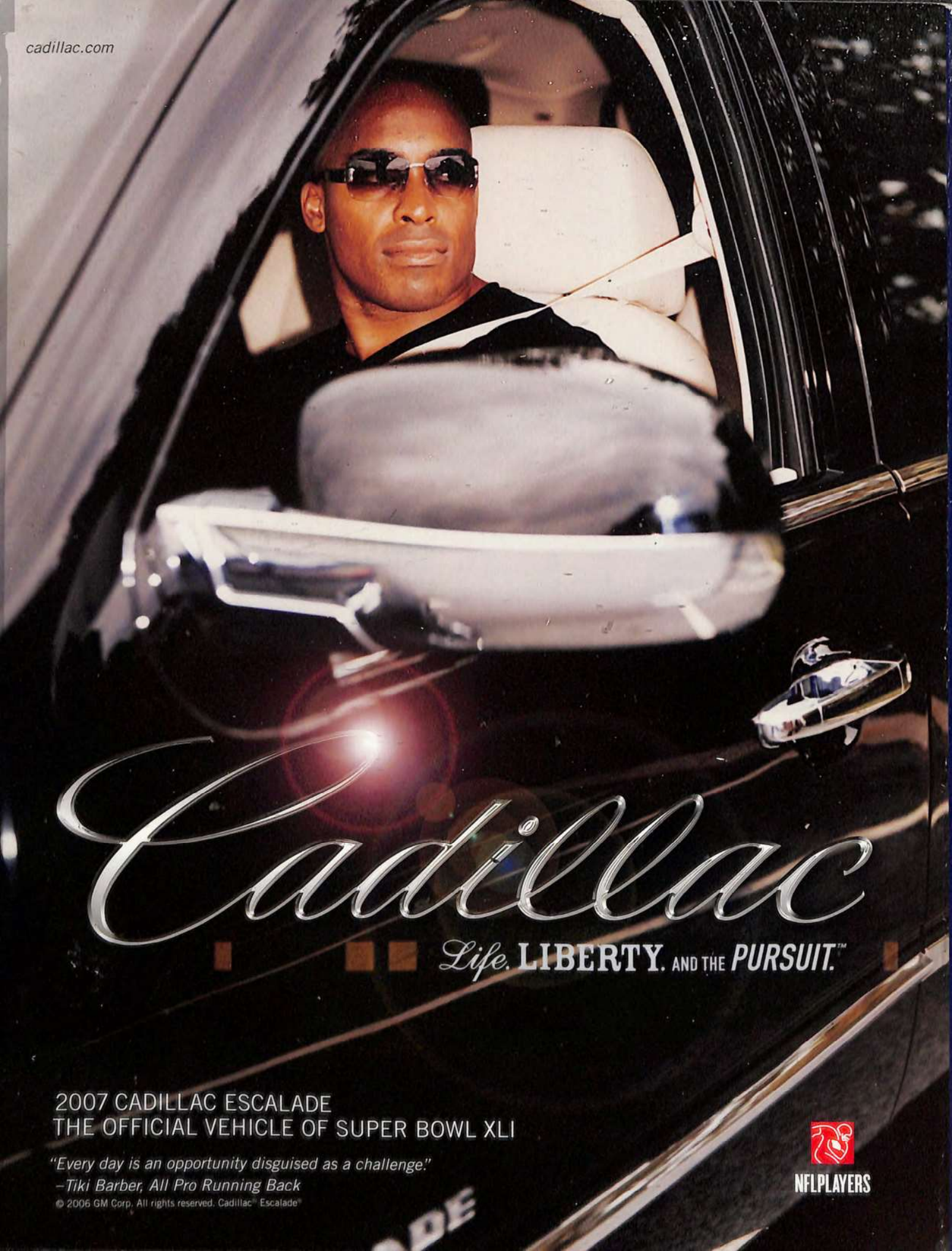
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